Isaac ASIMOV's SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

$1.75 DECEMBER 1983

REMEMBERING SIRI
DAN SIMMONS

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VIEWPOINT

IN DEFENSE OF FANTASY

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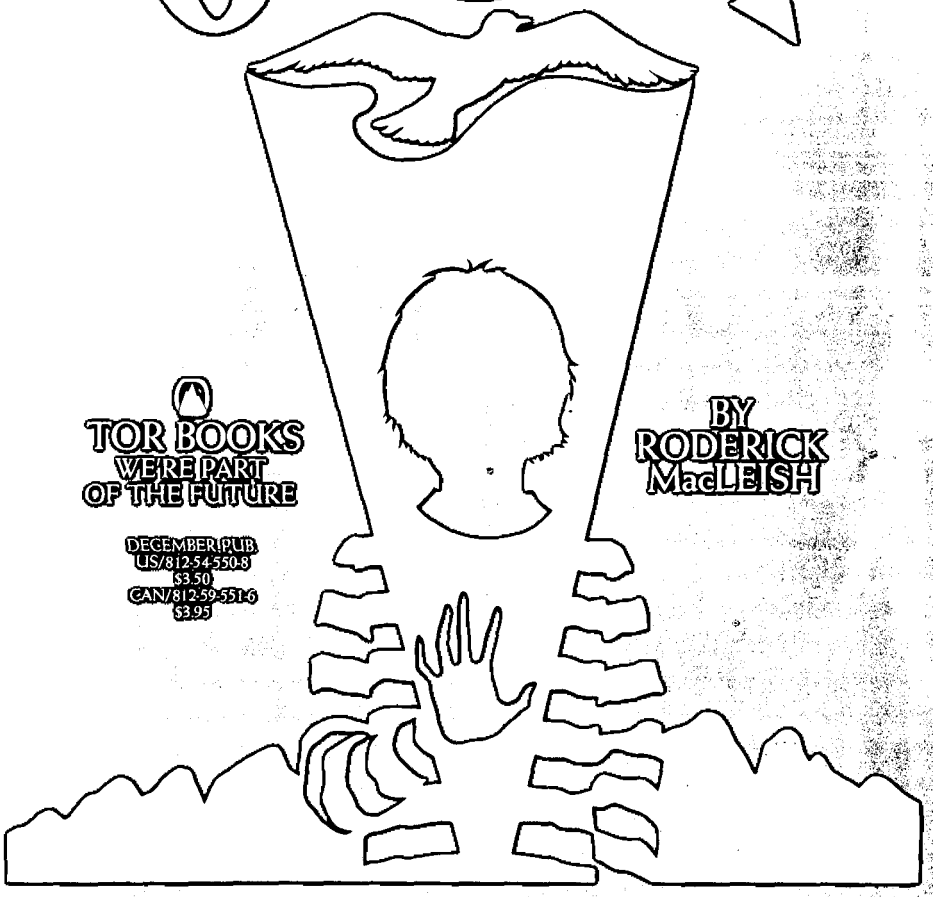

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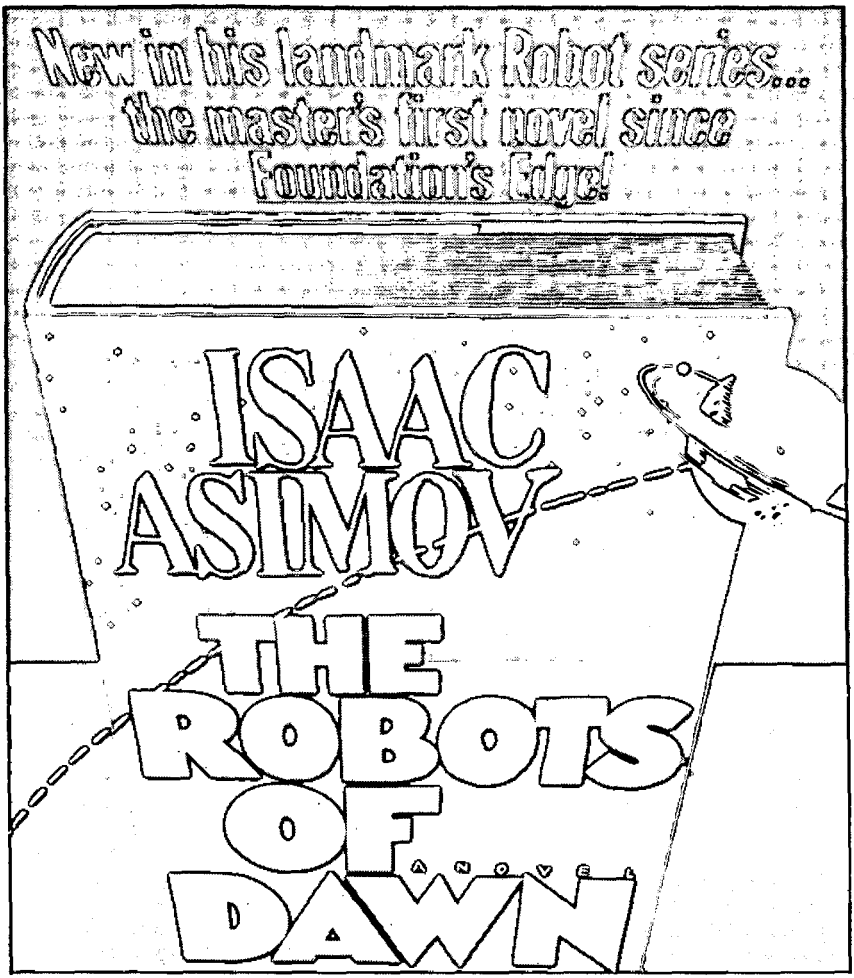

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Isaac ASIMOV's SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

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EDITORIAL

AUTOGRAPHS

by Isaac Asimov

I have never been an autograph hound myself and, to be perfectly frank, I do not understand the fascination that people find in them.

Suppose you have a signature written by Abraham Lincoln. You can stare at the dim line of curving ink and say to yourself, "My goodness, Honest Abe wrote that with his very own hand." It seems to me that would be good for ten seconds' worth of contemplation, and then the whole notion is used up. The next time you see it, what else is there to think of?

And why should there be something special about his *name?* If he had written 'General Grant' or 'yes, indeed,' wouldn't that still be something he had written with his very own hand?

I have the feeling that the awe that a signature inspires dates back to a time when literacy was quite exceptional. In those days, signatures that ordinary people encountered were very rare, and when encountered, were usually those of officials and were affixed to laws, orders, pardons, excommunications, and other documents of note, so that the idea grew that names were *powerful.*

Without going into matters of religion or demonology, we get a whiff of this mysterious power of a name in the familiar folk-tale of "Rumpelstiltzkin."

What has all this to do with science fiction?

I don't think you'll have any trouble guessing. With the increasing popularity of science fiction, comes the increasing demand for autographs from its practitioners.

This is not in itself a problem. Indeed, it is flattering. Even though I am not interested in autographs myself, I am rather pleased that people should seek mine. In fact, it is a source of particular pleasure to me that the very first time I was ever asked for an autograph (over forty years ago), it was from a young and unknown fan named Damon Knight. (Yes, *the* Damon Knight, who eventually founded "The Science Fiction Writers of America.")

However, the requests for au-

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tographs have been increasing in sheer number (not only in my case but, I'm sure, in those of other established writers) and, however flattering this may be, it does begin to pose a problem.

For instance at the 1955 World Convention, at which I was Guest of Honor, the attendance was 300. If ten percent wanted autographs, that could have been taken care of in a few minutes. At the 1980 World Convention, however, the attendance was 6,000 and when an autograph session was arranged, I signed steadily for an hour and a half. Towards the end, I grew less aware of the flattery implicit in the long line, and more aware of my aching fingers.

It does strike me, therefore, that there might be some points of etiquette that could well be developed for such occasions.

1 - Autographs in Public Places

a) Don't hand a closed book to a writer and leave it to him to find a place to sign. Open the book to the title page (or wherever you wish it signed) and present that to him. This is a simple courtesy that saves autographing time, and is considerate of others, if you are part of a line.

b) Be reasonable in your demand for personalization. When there is a long line, I merely sign my name over and over. When there is less pressure, I ask for a first name and write "To John." If there is still less pressure, I add "best wishes" and the day's date. It is kindest to allow a decision on such matters to be made by the autographer.

Unfortunately, many people wish to dictate the details of the autograph. They will sometimes ask for a personalization although there is a line stretching to the crack of doom, so that I am forced to ask them to come back when the line is done—and they sometimes act irritated at that. Or, if I ask the first name, they say firmly, "Jonathan, Ethelfrieda, Bonaparte, and Fido Schnellenhammer" (Fido is the dog, of course.) This is not really fair to the writer's cramping tendons.

Sometimes a little mash note is demanded, and you are asked to write, "To Morris, with best hopes for a happy bar mitzvah that will make your mother very proud of you." or "To Clinton, will full confidence that you, too, will be a great science fiction writer some day if you do your homework carefully and listen closely in school."

Mind you, I never refuse, but these things I do not reckon as part of the joy of authorship.

c) Please recognize that not all autographs are alike to the fellow scribbling his name. I have heard fellow-writers announce, very firmly, that they will sign only hard-cover editions of their books. I have

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never been able to bring myself to do this, alas, which means that I must sign, quite indiscriminately, everything that's handed to me (including blank checks—on which I carefully write "Harlan Ellison.")

Yet even I recognize that paperbacks represent a lower grade of flattery than hard-covers, that program booklets are still lower in the scale, and that a scrap of paper hastily torn out of a notebook produces almost no feeling of chest inflation at all. I sign scraps, yes, but I can never make myself believe that an odd piece of paper is going to be saved for long. Someone who presents a scrap for a signature is just being caught up in the mass hysteria; or else, it seems to him that since something is being given out for nothing, it is only fair that he get a sample—no matter what it might be.

2 - Autographs in the Mail

a) You have every right to expect an autograph for nothing, since the flattery might be regarded as sufficient return, but surely it isn't fair to *charge* the writer. It is very common for an autograph request to come through the mail without the inclusion of any provision that would make life a bit easier. The writer must find a card, sign it, find an envelope, address it; then put a 20-cent stamp on it. It is something that can be shrugged off where one

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"MIND-CROGGLING"... Harlan Ellison

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Games Day, London 1982

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Space Gamer Mag 1980, 1981

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Omni Mag 1980

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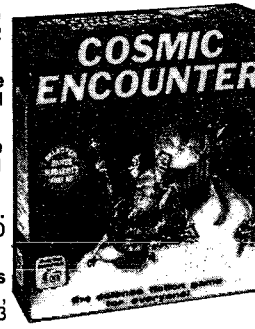

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person is concerned, but as the number of autograph requests increase, it becomes steadily more troublesome.

The proper way to ask for an autograph in the mail is to send along a card you wish signed, together with a stamped, self-addressed envelope. I don't insist on that, you understand, especially when the request is from a pre-teener who lacks the sophistication to think of such things, so I invest steadily in cards, envelopes, and postage.

Nevertheless, I can't help but dream of a better world.

b) You ought to indicate some personal interest in the writer whose autograph you request. If you have read something he has written, say so. Name the piece you have read. Say you liked it (if you did). It is rather deflating to get a letter that simply says: "Dear sir, I collect autographs. May I have yours?"

Well, at least that's polite. The other day I got a form-letter, without salutation, which said: "Sign the enclosed and return to the following address." Enclosed were five cards, and no return envelope or postage. I finally rebelled. I did not do as requested, but put the cards aside so that I could use them for people who were just a little more courteous.

c) Don't mail books for sig-

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nature, unless you write first and ask permission to do so. I know writers who say they keep any book sent them for signature, and add them to their own libraries. I can't do that, so that I am forced to sign those I receive, package them, figure out the postage (or go to the post-office). It is an enormous imposition on a writer. If you *do* send a book, send along a stamped, self-addressed mailer as well.

My own feeling is that it is far better to send a stick-on label or a bookplate, have the writer sign and return that, and then paste it in the book. That is much easier for everyone, and you don't have to trust a book you value to the tender mercies of the post-office.

(I was once asked by a distant bookstore if I would sign "a few" books. I agréed, not wishing to offend a bookstore. I received *sixty* of them. I signed them all, packaged them and trundled them to the post office. But I sent along a furious letter as well, because I was beyond caring if they were offended.)

3 - Signed photographs

In recent years, I have been receiving an increasing number of requests for signed photographs.

I draw the line at that. The practice has arisen because people in show business find that recognition of face and person is the key to success. They arrange to have a flattering photograph taken and reproduced in thousands of copies, then have some secretary send them off (all signed by stamp or by the secretary) to anyone requesting them.

That doesn't fit my case. I'm not in show-business. It's not my face I'm selling but my writing, and I'd rather people had my books than my photograph. So I don't have any photographs and I don't send any out. When someone requests a signed photograph, I explain and sign the letter of explanation—which I think is better. ●

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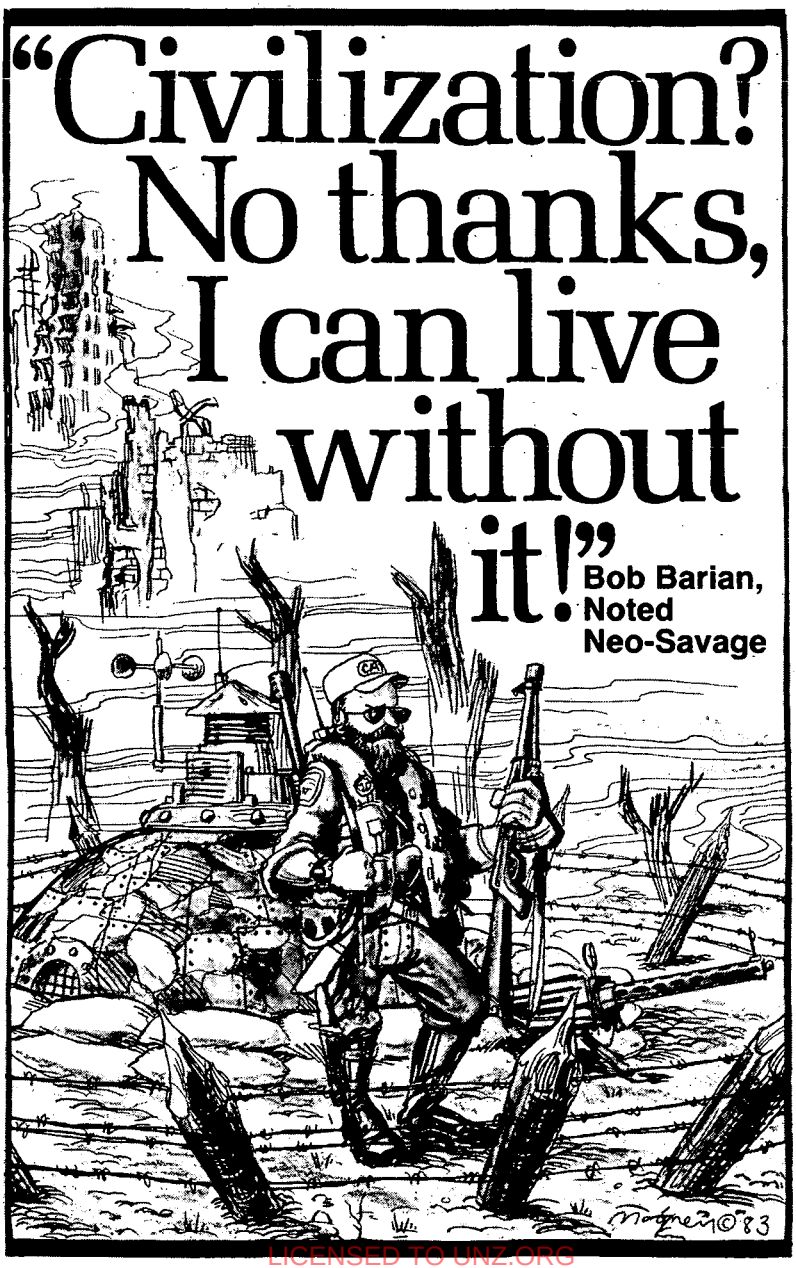

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LETTERS

SPECIAL NOTE

In the June 1983 issue, Mrs. Anna M. Manny presented a quote from me which she couldn't locate. Nor could I. I asked the readers for help and the first one to come up with the answer was Ms. Deborah E. Haddow who received my $5 check by pointing out that the quote was from my introduction to Jack Vance's "Dragon Masters" in Hugo Winners, Volume Two.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Ms. McCarthy:

If the Sixth Anniversary Issue is any indication of what I can expect from *IAsfm* under your direction, then I wish you many years as editor. From the three years that I have been a subscriber to your magazine, I can not recall a better-crafted story than "The Sidon in the Mirror" by Connie Willis. It is extremely rare that a story can stretch the boundaries of both technology and psychology and still remain credible. That this story does so and still retains the humanness which makes the reader care about its characters is a resounding tribute to Ms. Willis's talent. This story alone makes the issue special. If there is a way to pass on my respect to her, I would appreciate it.

I would also like to compliment three additional gems which appeared in that issue. "Cryptic" by Jack McDevitt, "$CALL LINK4-(CATHY)" by Cherie Wilkerson, and "The Blue Background" by Brian Aldiss were all excellently written and profoundly touching, each in its own unique way. Although I could go on at quite some length with rave compliments, I think that I have made my point. Bravo on the job you have done so far and keep it coming.

I do have one complaint. As an occasional (though, alas, so far unsuccessful) contributer, I always looked forward to receiving your critique sheets. I was quite disappointed when my last submission was returned with one of those ghastly "Thanks-but-no-thanks" form letters. Although I realize that they did involve considerable time and effort, they were another element which put your magazine in a class far above the rest. I hope you can find a way to reinstate them.

Also, I have a suggestion. How about a photograph of yourself and, perhaps, the rest of the staff in one of your issues. Although Dr. Asimov is one of my heroes, I really wouldn't mind a change of pace from his stern countenance staring

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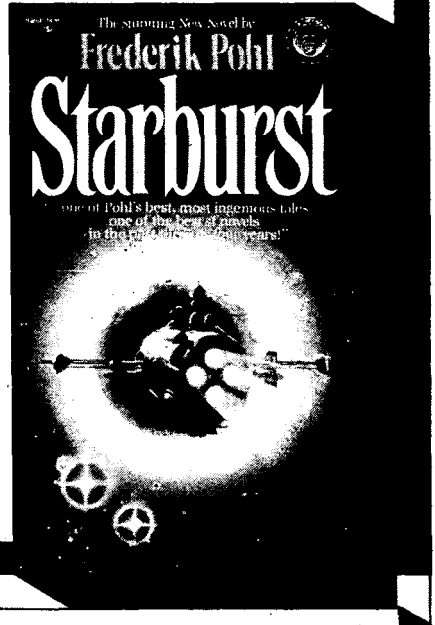
"Rollicking, hard-core Pohl... Lots of fun!"

—Washington Post Book World

Starburst

by Frederik Pohl

Dr. Dieter von Knefhausen had chosen a group of the best and brightest: these scientists *cum* astronauts were to explore the planet Alpha-Aleph and then return—or so they thought. But von Knefhausen knew otherwise—for there was no planet, no place to go...and no place from which to return!



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somewhere to the right and beyond me from the editorial page.

With respect and appreciation,

Barton Schindel
Pittsburgh, PA

I'm not stern at all. That's just my intellectual expression. However, I must admit that Shawna is far easier to look at than I am, and I would not object to a group photograph of the two of us, even if it didn't get to be used.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

I agree with you that a technical consultation service for SF writers is unnecessary. Readers who think that uncertainty about technical scientific points is what prevents them from writing salable manuscripts are kidding themselves. Of course any SF writer may occasionally realize he is not sure of some technical scientific point in his story, and have to check it. But this is not what is hard about writing SF. What is hard is telling a good story while meeting the special requirements of SF for conveying background information concerning the largely unfamiliar setting of the story. The science is the easy part, the playful part. (Psychologists tell us that children learn to be adults by playing. Similarly, SF is a literary means of playing with knowledge that helps us to grow up into the future.)

Whenever in the course of writing an SF story I find myself unsure of some scientific point, I think back to where I first learned about it, and then go back to that source to refresh my memory. Often my source was some magazine I read within the past few years, so I keep all my old magazines to refer to when I need to.

If that is unsuitable to some people, then I might suggest a similar alternative: consult the Periodical Index in the local Public Library. Virtually every fact that has ever been discovered, and every idea that has ever been thought, have turned up at one time or another in magazines. Of course you must be able to figure out what subject headings your particular item might be discussed under, and you must exercise discretion concerning a given magazine's reliability. It may take you a little time, reading likely articles until you find what you are looking for, but then how much time would it take you to get a reply from a technical consultation service through the mail?

Best Regards,

Ronald R. Lambert
Troy, MI

—Well, just so long as no one gets the idea that it doesn't matter whether a scientific point is right or wrong. Or as someone once said to me at the luncheon table, "It's only science fiction, *after all," and nearly got a grapefruit in the face.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Editors,

Since being introduced to your magazine some three years ago, I have been a frequent and quite satisfied reader. The quality of the stories and the general appearance of the publication have steadily improved, and I feel that you now

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have the classiest magazine of its kind now available.

Upon receiving the May issue, I am afraid I have to admit to the Deadly Sin of Gluttony. I ingested it whole, in one gulp. I am also sorry to have to admit that it left me with a slight case of mental indigestion.

The reason for this: the May issue, while up to your usual high standards in most respects, was noticeably lacking in one very important quality: the playful humor which has always been one of the most endearing facets of *IAsfm*.

With the welcome exception of J.O. Jeppson's light Pshrink's Anonymous story, this issue contained stories dealing with rather weighty matters (cannibalism, lonliness, gruesome death, etc.) which, though handled well, gave it an unnecessarily somber mood.

While there is nothing wrong with provoking serious thought, I, for one, prefer to have such meaty fare broken up at intervals with something lighter; to clear the palate, so to speak. Please don't make the mistake of taking yourselves too seriously to have a little fun.

I look forward to more quality SF from you, and would like to commend Val Lakey for the excellent artwork (as usual) accompanying "The Eternity Wave."

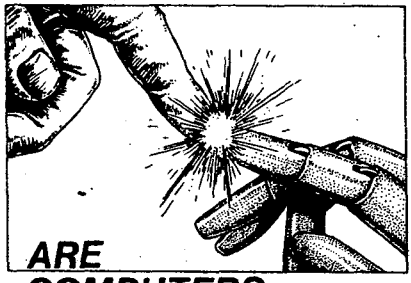
Edric M. Camp
Erie, PA

We will never take ourselves too seriously to have a little fun. You can be sure of that.—And just think what fun it is living with someone as fun-filled as J. O. Jeppson.

—Isaac Asimov

Doc,

I have been reading your fine magazine for two years, and have thoroughly enjoyed every issue. There is one recurring type of letter in every one of those issues, that is really starting to bug me, though. I am sick as hell of the babies who write in to cry about the format changes.



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This is a huge world, with thousands of different magazines in many languages. You don't open a *Time* magazine and see letters griping about the "Nation" section being double-spaced. I think some of the people who read this magazine go over every issue with an electron microscope. Variety is the spice of life!

Let's face it Doc, no matter how you change this magazine, the babies will always cry.

I love your publication, and wouldn't care if the columns were quadruple spaced, and the printing upside down. Let's see more letters about stories, and fewer morons like myself.

Christian C. De Baun

Well, it's free speech I insist upon. We don't really *mind complaints and pickiness; in fact, it makes us feel the readership is a family that knows that a little foot-stamping isn't going to make us stop loving each other.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Doctor and Friends,

The Viewpoint section of your magazine is always thought-provoking. Please continue to present it. Pamela Sargent's "Immodest Proposal" certainly provoked my thinking. However, I believe she has one aspect of her theory wrong: it is not authors' names but their universes which will be handed down to apprentices.

There is some evidence today that such a phenomenon is beginning. It is possible to buy about 20 different Star Trek books, most of which are not written by the same author. Indeed, the creator of the series, Gene Roddenberry, has written only one of those books. Some are pretty good stories, others only so-so; but I'd buy them again, and so would a lot of other fans. We want to know more about the Star Trek universe.

For those who reject the pop appeal of Star Trek, there are other examples. Sherlock Holmes has a wide following, and new books about him appear regularly. He was created by a single author, but others have taken over the writing since Conan Doyle's death (and the end of his copyrights). A newer idea is the Sanctuary world, edited by Robert Asprin. That has been a joint operation from the beginning. Each writer brings a different point of view to the same facts. Newer writers are not necessarily left out by established writers in other areas. Marion Zimmer Bradley has encouraged her fans to write in her Darkover world, under her direction, and has published an anthology of those works.

When paperback books cost 50¢, and only one or two science fiction books appeared in a month, I could afford the cost of a disappointment. Now spaceships and dragons fill up rows of shelves, and my only clue to the type of story I want to read is authors' names or traditions. There are worse ways to choose a book than from seeing Star Trek or Sherlock Holmes—or *Foundation* or Asimov's *Robots*—on the cover. I know I'll enjoy something about those books and will choose them over the completely unknown if a choice must be made. (And yes, Doctor, we do expect a fifth Foundation book and a sixth and . . .)

Writers should welcome this, not reject it, for they will still have the

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Volume Two of *The Reluctant King*

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opportunity to create new worldviews and attract others to that banner. I think it sounds like a lot of fun for readers and writers alike.
Peace,

Karen Hunter
3635 Melrose Ave.
Lincoln, NE 68506

My satirical piece, "In the Tradition Of: An Immodest Proposal," seems to have convinced some people that I was serious. That such an essay could be taken seriously only shows how bad things actually are in publishing; I intended a reductio ad absurdum *and have instead apparently presented the next logical development. Clearly, those who were taken in are more in tune with publishing's trends than I am.*

—Pamela Sargent

Dear IAsfm Editorial Staff:

I don't buy IAsfm at the newsstand as often as I might.

When I see a new issue of any SF magazine, I page through it, and read the blurb at the front of each story. If a blurb piques my interest, I'll probably buy the magazine.

However, if the blurb only tells about the author, I have no way of knowing if I'll like the story or not. So I probably won't buy the magazine.

I don't mean that you should drop the information about the author; but please, tell me a little about the story too.

Sincerely yours,

David A. Hartmann
631 Center St.
Elgin, IL 60120

You make a good point, but I think in sorrow of the many times that John Campbell would give away the surprise ending of a story in order to make his *point in the blurb. Sometimes it's risky to talk about the story.*

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov, Shawna, et al.,

I wrote to you last month to thank you for printing "The Blue Background" by Brian Aldiss even though it wasn't SF. This month I feel the desire to write again. (This desire seems to be rampant in me now; either it reflects my fondness for stories you have recently printed, or my growing fondness for writing letters. I like to think, or hope, that it is the stories.)

I speak of the story "The Eternity Wave" by Scott Elliot Marbach (May '83). It delights me to find such a treasure in your pages. I felt the same joy after the first few pages as I had while reading "The Postman" by David Brin (Nov. '82).

A digression: By the way, I was very disappointed to see that "The Postman" did not make the Nebula Award nominations. I admit I don't read every story in every major SF magazine, and I've been reading science fiction and fantasy literature itself for less than three years, but I note that some of the stories *on* the list (and congratulations on *Foundation's Edge* making it—and the bestseller lists) I passed by after a few paragraphs or a few pages because they didn't hold my attention. I have enough other reading to do without spending my time on a shorter story I have doubts about. (I know I probably cheat myself out of a lot.) "The

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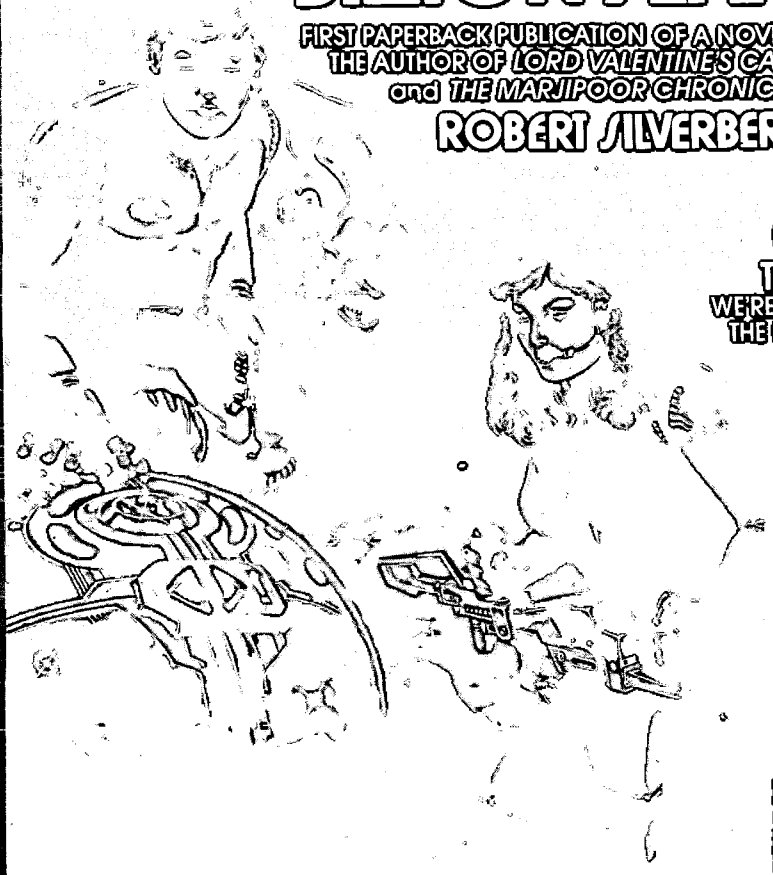

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Postman," however, held me from the start, and it is to me the most memorable story I've read in any fantasy or SF magazine in the last two or so years.

That is until, perhaps, now, with the "The Eternity Wave." Mr. Marbach's story reminded me of Norman Spinrad's *Void Captain's Tale* in its painful journey toward transcendence, and was at times even more poignant for me. I love his heart-wrenching image of the captive dolphin.

I would appreciate you passing on this reader's gratitude to Mr. Marbach, and I thank you for being the kind of magazine to attract stories such as "The Postman," "The Eternity Wave," (and, by the way, "Enemy Mine," which I just found and read in *Nebula Winners Fifteen* and will never forget) and yes, even for "The Blue Background," and for printing them and bringing them to us readers.

I want more.

Joseph M. Kurtenbach
P.O. Box 216
Greeley, NE 68842

There are indeed some people who think that Nebula nominations and awards are like the "peace of God," which, according to Philippians 4:7, "passeth all understanding."

By now, you all know that "The Postman" did make the Hugo nominations ballot, however. By the time this sees print, it may even have won.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Shawna:

I just wanted to put in writing how much I've enjoyed being a part of your magazine this past year. Not only has "Mooney's Module" given me a unique forum for developing my own style of graphic humor, but the stories you publish are a constant delight, and have reawakened my long dormant penchant for SF. I couldn't begin to go into individual stories without mentioning all of them. Suffice it to say that the overall high quality, and especially the inventiveness of plot and concept, are what I find most appealing.

What I want to know from your writers is: Where the heck do you get your *ideas?*

By the way Shawna, I've not quite finished your *Aliens and Outworlders* collection, but so far everything I've read is excellent. Good job!

To the Future,

Gerry Mooney
New York, NY

My own answer to "Where the heck do you get your ideas?" is by "thinking and thinking and thinking," but no one wants to accept that. I'm sorry, friends, there's no short-cut.

—Isaac Asimov

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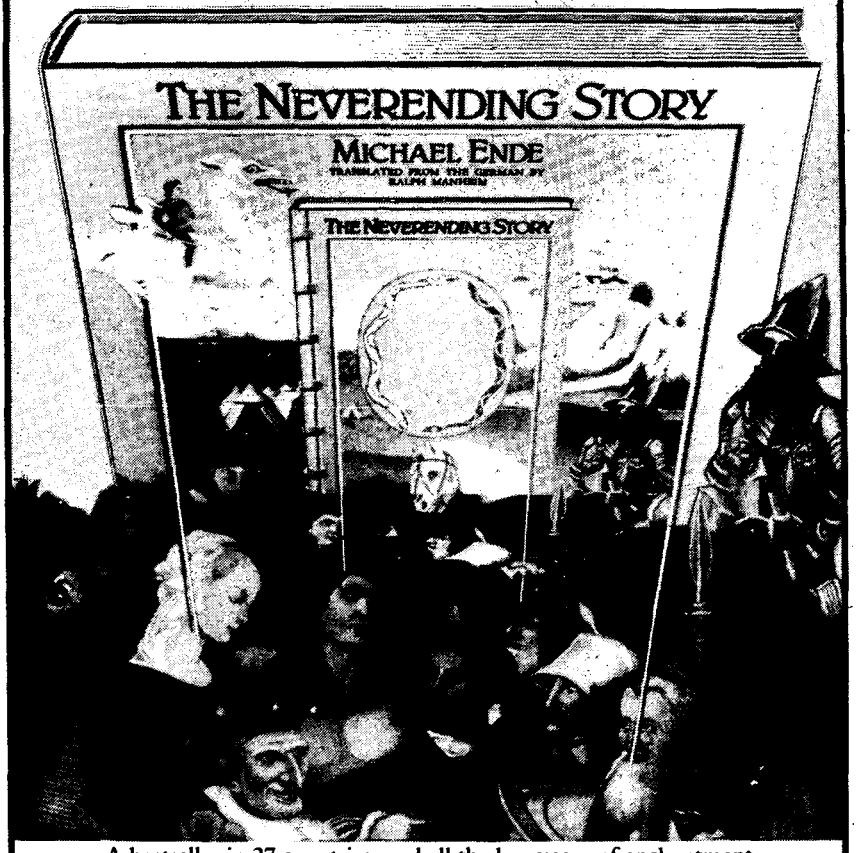

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DOUBLEDAY

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IAsfm Puzzle #16 by Merl H. Reagle

DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL

The 28-23-31-65-8-10-36-55-17-5-53-13-71-44-54-20-42-62-43-2-30

Note: Replace the numbers above with the letters in their corresponding squares (in the diagram) to discover the title of this puzzle.

ACROSS

1 The hero of our story
7 German pronoun
10 Diminishes
14 What he says goes. Period.
15 1 Across gets to do it
16 1 Across steely sidekick
17 The director
19 See 29 Across
20 Our hero's money
22 Piercing tool
23 Pop the question
26 Q-U filler
27 Confuse
29 With 19 Across, actor who played Bobby in our story
32 Country sweeper, in a way
34 Hiawatha's craft
35 She played Mrs. Benson in our story
37 Much-used joiner
39 He played 1 Across
42 Wintry blanket, in Scotland
43 Pitch dark
44 Made of a certain wood
46 Thrill
48 Common SF combining form
49 Throw, in Paris
51 Comic-strip yell
54 Huge ref. bk.
55 Oh, to Ohm
56 The year of our story
61 Military installation
63 Harry Bates story on which our movie was based (with 71 and 72 Across)
67 Leg it
68 Peer Gynt's mom
69 Melodic
70 Shoe size or scream
71 See 63 Across
72 See 63 Across

DOWN

1 College fraternity, for short
2 Cinematographer Tover, of our story
3 Fireproof stuff: abbr.
4 Mindlessly repeated
5 Doughnuts
6 —— Pradesh, India
7 Jerry Lewis character
8 Rural possessive
9 SF writer Kit
10 In SF, this could be the start of something big
11 Words uttered by 35 Across to save the world from destruction
12 Fun for the rowdy
13 Classy quality
18 Men's names: abbr.
21 Word in many Spanish place names
23 Start of a series
24 Belonging to Thailand, before
25 Material in which 16 Across is encased to immobilize him
28 Huntresses
30 Washington, D.C., in our story

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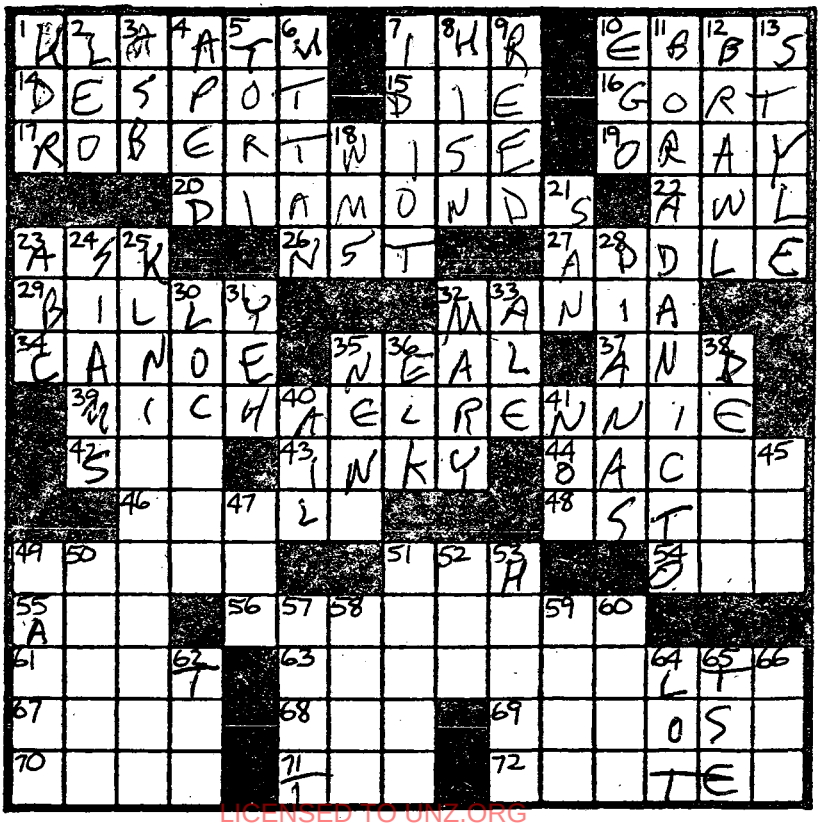
Solution on page 166

31 Slangy affirmative
32 Cohan tune
33 Drink with cockles
35 Hawaiian goose
36 Certain lodge member
38 Farm equipment pioneer
40 Little island, old style
41 What "sleigh" has
45 Sleepy land
47 Comment from the pound
49 He played Prof. Barnhardt in our story
50 French school
51 "... poem lovely as —"
52 Certainly, captain
53 "— I doing?"
57 Start of a success axiom
58 Crooked seam on a boat
59 Tiber tributary
60 Yale students
62 Punter's need
64 His wife was a pillar of society
65 Mao —-tung
66 Poetic contraction



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GAMING

by Dana Lombardy

Have you ever wondered what's really in those boxes delivered every week to your next-door neighbor? Or that the innocent-looking bag lady who always makes the same rounds may be up to something more sinister. . . .

Well, you're right. There *is* a conspiracy going on—in the game *Illuminati* by Steve Jackson Games (Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760). The definition of "illuminati" is any number of groups, reputedly of ancient origin, claiming special knowledge or enlightenment. These secret or mystical societies and power blocs are trying to control the world. Not by guns and missiles, but by stealth and guile.

Each of the two to six players controls a cabal of illuminati —secret masters struggling for world domination. As a player takes control of group after group, he expands his wealth and power. No ploy is too devious, no strategem too low . . . in short, it's good clean fun for an evening.

Illuminati comes in the small plastic pocket box S J Games are known for. This card game has a small format, 24-page rules book, 6 Illuminati cards, 41 cards representing other groups, 7 special event cards, and a large sheet of money counters (megabucks) that need to be cut apart for play.

The rules note that if you can't get the money cut out, you have no business trying to take over the world. There's a lot of subtle and not-so-subtle humor throughout the game. You'll also need two 6-sided dice (not provided). Steal them from another game, of course. . . .

To win the game, a player must be the first to control a set number of groups. This is based on the number of players in the game: with 6 players you must be the first to control 9 groups; with 5 players it's 10 groups; with 4 players it's 12 groups; and with 2 or 3 players, it's 13 groups. Depending on what Illuminati you represent, you may also win the game by achieving a specific goal, such as destroying a set number of groups, or

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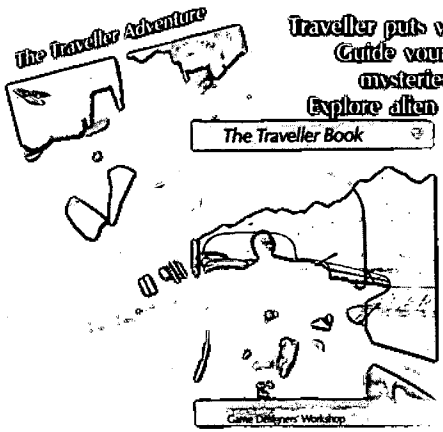

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accumulating a certain number of megabucks.

To start the game, each player randomly picks an Illuminati card. You will be one of six different organizations: the Bavarian Illuminati, the oldest and most powerful; the Gnomes of Zurich, the richest; the Bermuda Triangle, the most mysterious; the Servants of Cthulhu, students of things man was not meant to know; the Discordian Society, who delight in confusion; or the UFOs, the most secret and most flexible group.

With each turn, players collect megabucks based on the total values of all the groups they control, then draw a card from the deck, then perform two "actions" plus take a "free action." These actions include: transfering money; attacking other groups to control, destroy, or neutralize them; moving a group; dropping a group; aiding an attack of another player; or using a special-event card.

The groups that you're trying to control range from the serious, such as the Democrats, Republicans, I.R.S., C.I.A., F.B.I., etc., to the semi-serious, such as the Feminists, Madison Avenue, South American Nazis, etc. There's also the ridiculous: the Moral Minority; Boy Sprouts; Moonies; Punk Rockers; Cattle Mutilators; the Semiconscious Liberation Army; and, yes—Science Fiction Fans!

Each group's card has six elements: an incoming arrow to show which player controls it (the group card is placed next to the player's Illuminati card); outgoing arrows to show how many other groups that group can control (up to three for a powerful group like the Mafia); the group name; special abilities; the group's alignment (Government or Communist, Liberal or Conservative, Peaceful or Violent, Straight or Weird, or Fanatic, or Criminal); and the group's characteristics (power, resistance, income).

Besides the specific game rules outlined above, there are recommendations for negotiating deals and conspiring behind another player's back if he leaves the room.

Illuminati is fun, fast-playing, and funny. If you have a paranoid friend, it's the perfect gift. ●

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MARTIN GARDNER

1984

4	8	6.4	16	10
2.5	5	4	10	6.25
2	4	3.2	8	5
1	2	1.6	4	2.5
3.1	6.2	4.96	12.4	7.75

The year 1984, the title of George Orwell's famous science-fiction novel (in the tradition of such negative utopias as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World,* and H. G. Wells's *When the Sleeper Wakes*) is almost upon us. To honor the coming year I have constructed the Orwellian magic square shown above.

It is magic in a much more remarkable way than the conventional magic square which has a constant sum for each of its rows, columns, and main diagonals. This square is magic in the sense that if you freely choose five of its numbers, according to a simple procedure, then multiply them together on a calculator, the product is certain to be 1984!

If you don't believe it, try the following. Select any of the 25 cells you like, and draw a circle around its number. Now cross out all the other numbers in the same horizontal row as the chosen number, and similarly cross out all the other numbers in the same vertical column. To avoid damaging the page you might want to photocopy the square or draw it on a sheet of paper. You'll need

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many copies if you want to repeat the trick or show it to friends.

Now select a second number. Circle it, and again cross out the numbers in the same row and same column. Repeat this five times. Each time, of course, you must choose a number not circled or crossed out. When you finish, there will be five circled numbers. Although they were selected at random, when you multiply them on your calculator, you will see 1984 on display as the final product!

It is not generally known that before Orwell picked 1984 as the time for his novel, G. K. Chesterton had used the same year for an earlier novel, *Napoleon of Notting Hill.* Orwell predicted that by 1984 the United States would be part of a tyranny under the control of Big Brother, a dictator who resembled Stalin. Of course it hasn't happened. Chesterton's novel went the other way. It predicted a revival in England of local patriotism so intense that Notting Hill, then a suburb of London (today it is one of London's slum districts), revolts against the government of England, waging a war to become a separate nation. This didn't happen either. Both novels, indeed, illustrate a fact about predicting history that Chesterton himself described in the first paragraph of his novel:

> The human race, to which so many of my readers belong, has been playing at children's games from the beginning, and will probably do it till the end, which is a nuisance for the few people who grow up. And one of the games to which it is most attached is called, 'Keep tomorrow dark,' and which is also named (by the rustics in Shropshire, I have no doubt) 'Cheat the Prophet.' The players listen very carefully and respectfully to all that the clever men have to say about what is to happen in the next generation. The players then wait until all the clever men are dead, and bury them nicely. They then go and do something else. That is all. For a race of simple tastes, however, it is great fun.

All numbers are grist for puzzle making, and 1984 is no exception. For instance, is it possible to use just the ten digits (0 through 9) to form a set of numbers that will add to 1984? It is easy to get 1980 in this way: 6 + 28 + 407 + 1,539 = 1980. Curiously, it is *not* possible to get 1984. However, there is one digit, and one only, such that if you omit it, the remaining nine digits *will* form sets of numbers that add to 1984.

What digit must be omitted? In other words, what set of nine different digits will form a group of numbers (using each digit only once) that have a sum of 1984? To answer this question it is not necessary to experiment with numbers. All you need is a bit of elementary number theory of the sort that accountants used to know before computers took over all their calculating tasks. The answer is on page 88.

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ABOARD THE FIRST SPACE HABITAT.

(EDITED BY DEAN ING)

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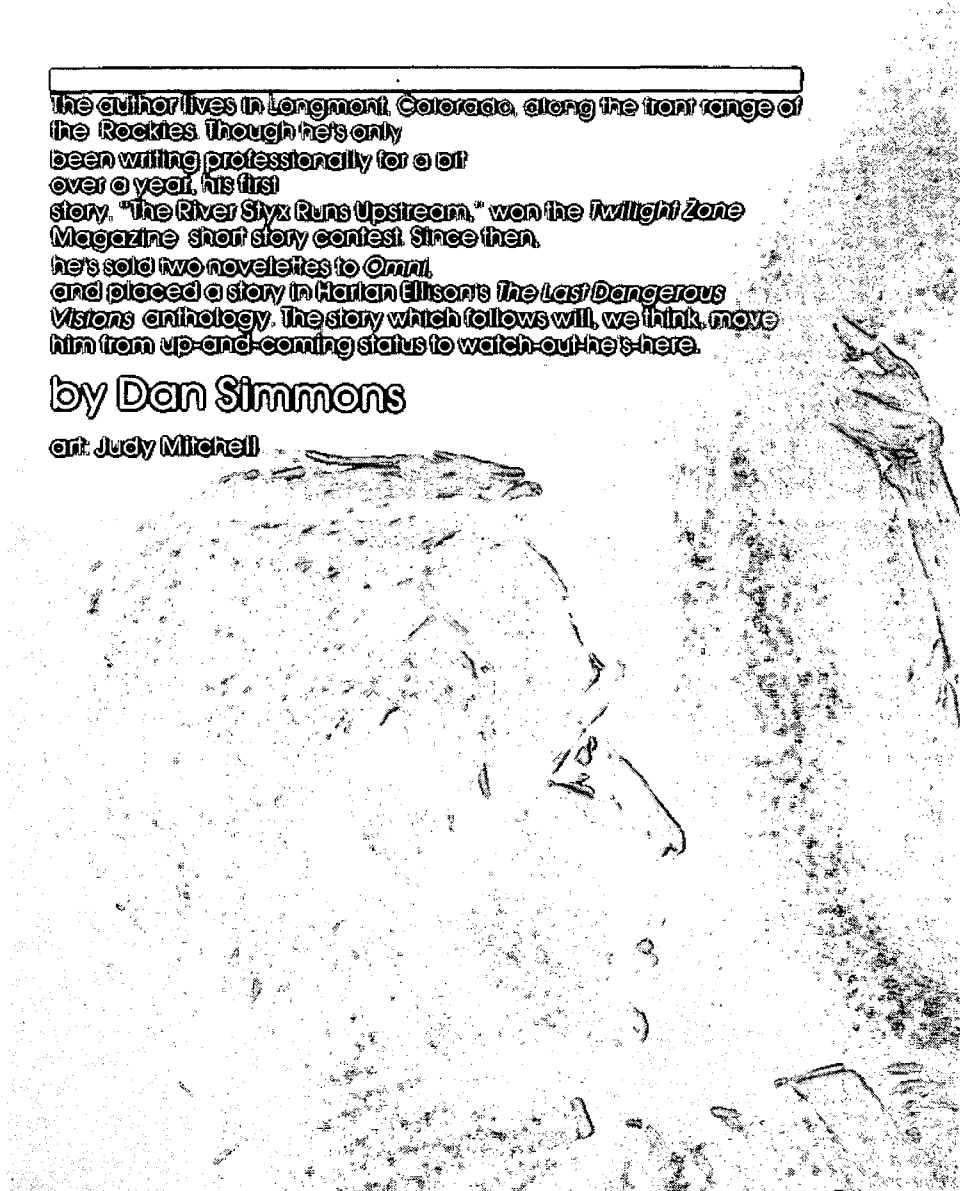
The author lives in Longmont, Colorado, along the front range of the Rockies. Though he's only been writing professionally for a bit over a year, his first story, "The River Styx Runs Upstream," won the *Twilight Zone* Magazine short story contest. Since then, he's sold two novelettes to *Omni*, and placed a story in Harlan Ellison's *The Last Dangerous Visions* anthology. The story which follows will, we think, move him from up-and-coming status to watch-out-he's-here.

by Dan Simmons

art: Judy Mitchell



REMEMBERING SIRI

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I climb the steep hill to Siri's tomb on the day the islands return to the shallow seas of the Equatorial Archipelago. The day is perfect and I hate it for being so. The sky is as tranquil as tales of Old Earth's seas, the shallows are dappled with ultramarine tints, and a warm breeze blows in from the sea to ripple the russet willowgrass on the hillside near me.

Better low clouds and gray gloom on such a day. Better mist or a shrouding fog which sets the masts in Firstsite Harbor dripping and raises the lighthouse horn from its slumbers. Better one of the great sea-simoons blowing up out of the cold belly of the south, lashing before it the motile isles and their dolphin herders until they seek refuge in lee of our atolls and stony peaks.

Anything would be better than this warm spring day when the sun moves through a vault of sky so blue that it makes me want to run, to jump in great loping arcs, and to roll in the soft grass as Siri and I have done at just this spot.

Just this spot. I pause to look around me. The willowgrass bends and ripples like the fur of some great beast as the salt-tinged breeze gusts up out of the south. I shield my eyes and search the horizon but nothing moves there. Out beyond the lava reef, the sea begins to chop and lift itself in nervous strokes.

"Siri," I whisper. I say her name without meaning to do so. A hundred meters down the slope, the crowd pauses to watch me and to catch its collective breath. The procession of mourners and celebrants stretches for more than a kilometer to where the white buildings of the city begin. I can make out the gray and balding head of my younger son in the vanguard. He is wearing the blue and gold robes of Hegemony. I know that I should wait for him, walk with him, but he and the other aging council members can not keep up with my young, shiptrained muscles and steady stride. Decorum dictates that I should walk with him and my granddaughter Lira and the other ladies of the society.

To hell with it. And to hell with them.

I turn and jog up the steep hillside. Sweat begins to soak my loose cotton shirt before I reach the curving summit of the ridge and catch sight of the tomb.

Siri's tomb.

I stop. The wind chills me although the sunlight is warm enough as it glints off the flawless white stone of the silent mausoleum. The grass is high near the sealed entrance to the crypt. Rows of faded festival pennants on ebony staffs line the narrow gravel path.

Hesitating, I circle the tomb and approach the steep cliff edge

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a few meters beyond. The willowgrass is bent and trampled here where irreverent picnickers have laid their blankets. There are several fire rings formed from the perfectly round, perfectly white stones purloined from the border of the gravel path.

I cannot stop a smile. I know the view from here; the great curve of the outer harbor with its natural seawall, the low, white buildings of Firstsite, and the colorful hulls and masts of the catamarans bobbing at anchorage. Near the pebble beach beyond Common Hall, a young woman in a white skirt moves toward the water. For second I think that it is Siri and my heart pounds. I half prepare to throw up my arms in response to her wave but she does not wave. I watch in silence as the distant figure turns away and is lost in the shadows of the old boat building.

Above me, far out from the cliff, a wide-winged Thomas Hawk circles above the lagoon on rising thermals and scans the shifting bluekelp beds with its infrared vision, seeking out harpseals or torpids. *Nature is stupid,* I think and sit in the soft grass. Nature sets the stage all wrong for such a day and then it is insensitive enough to throw in a bird searching for prey which have long since fled the polluted waters near the growing city.

I remember another Thomas Hawk on that first night when Siri and I came to this hilltop. I remember the moonlight on its wings and the strange, haunting cry which echoed off the cliff and seemed to pierce the dark air above the gaslights of the village below.

Siri was sixteen . . . no, not quite sixteen . . . and the moonlight that touched the hawk's wings above us also painted her bare skin with milky light and cast shadows beneath the soft circles of her breasts. We looked up guiltily when the bird's cry cut the night and Siri said, "It was the nightingale and not the lark,/That pierc'd the fearful hollow of thine ear."

"Huh?" I said. Siri was almost sixteen. I was nineteen. But Siri knew the slow pace of books and the cadences of theater under the stars. I knew only the stars.

"Relax, young Shipman," she whispered and pulled me down beside her then. "It's only an old Tom's Hawk hunting. Stupid bird. Come back, Shipman. Come back, Merin."

The *Los Angeles* had chosen that moment to rise above the horizon and to float like a wind-blown ember west across the strange constellations of Maui-Covenant, Siri's world. I lay next to her and described the workings of the great C-plus spinship which was catching the high sunlight against the drop of night above us, and all the while my hand was sliding lower along her

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smooth side, her skin seemed all velvet and electricity, and her breath came more quickly against my shoulder. I lowered my face to the hollow of her neck, to the sweat-and-perfume essence of her tousled hair.

"Siri," I say and this time her name is not unbidden. Below me, below the crest of the hill and the shadow of the white tomb, the crowd stands and shuffles. They are impatient with me. They want me to unseal the tomb, to enter, and to have my private moment in the cool silent emptiness that has replaced the warm presence that was Siri. They want me to say my farewells so they can get on with their rites and rituals, open the waiting farcaster doors, and join the waiting worldweb of the Hegemony.

To hell with that. And to hell with them.

I pull up a tendril of the thickly woven willowgrass, chew on the sweet stem, and watch the horizon for the first sign of the migrating islands. The shadows are still long in the morning light. The day is young. I will sit here for awhile and remember.

I will remember Siri.

Siri was a . . . what? . . . a bird, I think, the first time I saw her. She was wearing some sort of mask with bright feathers. When she removed it to join in the raceme quadrille, the torchlight caught the deep auburn tints of her hair. She was flushed, cheeks aflame, and even from across the crowded Common I could see the startling green of her eyes contrasting with the summer heat of her face and hair. It was Festival Night, of course. The torches danced and sparked to the stiff breeze coming in off the harbor and the sound of the flutists on the breakwall playing for the passing isles was almost drowned out by surf sounds and the crack of pennants snapping in the wind. Siri was almost sixteen and her beauty burned more brightly than any of the torches set round the throng-filled square. I pushed through the dancing crowd and went to her.

It was five years ago for me. It was more than sixty-five years ago for us. It seems only yesterday.

This is not going well.

Where to start?

"What say we go find a little nooky, kid?" Mike Osho was speaking. Short, squat, his pudgy face a clever caricature of a Buddha, Mike was a god to me then. We were all gods; long-lived if not immortal, well-paid if not quite divine. The Hegemony had chosen us to help crew one of its precious quantum leap C-plus

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Stephen R. Donaldson and Terry Brooks hail the fanciful new novel by the bestselling author of *The Princess Bride*

THE SILENT GONDOLIERS

A Fable by

S. MORGENSTERN

Illustrated by Paul Giovanopoulos

Stephen R. Donaldson says it's "poignant and delightful." Terry Brooks calls it "a lovely wry contemporary fable." It's the story of Luigi, a gondolier with the goony smile, and his grand adventure on the Grand Canal.

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spinships, so how could we be less than gods? It was just that Mike, brilliant, mercurial, irreverent Mike, was a little older and a little higher in the Shipboard pantheon than young Merin Aspic.

"Hah. Zero probability of that," I said. We were scrubbing up after a twelve hour shift with the farcaster construction crew. Shuttling the workers around their chosen singularity-point some 163,000 kilometers out from Maui-Covenant was a lot less glamorous for us than the four-month leap from Hegemony-space. During the C-plus portion of the trip we had been master specialists; forty-nine starship experts shepherding some two hundred nervous passengers. Now the passengers had their hardsuits on and we Shipmen had been reduced to serving as glorified truck drivers as the construction crew wrestled the bulky singularity containment-sphere into place.

"Zero probability," I repeated. "Unless the groundlings have added a whorehouse to that quarantine island they leased us."

"Nope. They haven't," grinned Mike. He and I had our three days of planetary R-and-R coming up but we knew from Shipmaster Singh's briefings and the moans of our Shipmates that the only groundtime we had to look forward to would be spent on a 7 by 4-mile island administered by the Hegemony. It wasn't even one of the motile isles we had heard about, just another volcanic peak near the equator. Once there, we could count on real gravity underfoot, unfiltered air to breathe, and the chance to taste unsynthesized food. But we could also count on the fact that the only intercourse we would have with the Maui-Covenant colonists would be through buying local artifacts at the duty-free store. Even those were sold by Hegemony trade specialists. Many of our Shipmates had chosen to spend their R-and-R on the *Los Angeles*.

"So how do we find a little nooky, Mike? The colonies are off limits until the farcaster's working. That's about 60 years away, local time. Or are you talking about Meg in Spincomp?"

"Stick with me, kid," said Mike. "Where there's a will, there's a way."

I stuck with Mike. There were only five of us in the dropship. It was always a thrill to me to fall out of high orbit into the atmosphere of a real world. Especially a world that looked as much like Old Earth as Maui-Covenant did. I stared at the blue and white limb of the planet until the seas were *down* and we were in atmosphere, approaching the twilight terminator in a gentle glide at three times the speed of our own sound.

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We were gods then. But even gods must descend from their high thrones upon occasion.

Siri's body never ceased to amaze me. That time on the Archipelago. Three weeks in that huge, swaying treehouse under the billowing treesails with the dolphin herders keeping pace like outriders, tropical sunsets filling the evening with wonder, the canopy of stars at night, and our own wake marked by a thousand phosphorescent swirls that mirrored the constellations above. And still it is Siri's body I remember. For some reason—shyness, the years of separation—she wore two strips of swimsuit for the first few days of our Archipelago stay and the soft white of her breasts and lower belly had not darkened to match the rest of her tan before I had to leave again.

I remember her that first time. Triangles in the moonlight as we lay in the soft grass above Firstsite Harbor. Her silk pants catching on a weave of willowgrass. There was a child's modesty then; the slight hesitation of something given prematurely. But also pride. The same pride that later allowed her to face down the angry mob of Separatists on the steps of the Hegemony Consulate in South Tern and send them to their homes in shame.

I remember my fifth planetfall, our Fourth Reunion. It was one of the few times I ever saw her cry. She was almost regal in her fame and wisdom by then. She had been elected four times to the All Thing and the Hegemony Council turned to her for advice and guidance. She wore her independence like a royal cloak and her fierce pride had never burned more brightly. But when we were alone in the stone villa south of Fevarone, it was she who turned away. I was nervous, frightened by this powerful stranger, but it was Siri—Siri of the straight back and proud eyes, who turned her face to the wall and said through tears, "Go away. Go away. Merin. I don't want you to see me. I'm a crone, all slack and sagging. *Go away.*"

I confess that I was rough with her then. I pinned her wrists with my left hand—using a strength which surprised even me—and tore her silken robe down the front in one move. I kissed her shoulders, her neck, the faded shadows of stretchmarks on her taut belly, and scar on her upper leg from the skimmer crash some forty of her years earlier. I kissed her graying hair and the lines etched in the once-smooth cheeks. I kissed her tears.

"Jesus, Mike, this can't be legal," I'd said when my friend unrolled the hawking mat from his backpack. We were on Island

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241, as the Hegemony traders had so romantically named the desolate volcanic blemish which they had chosen for our R-and-R site. Island 241 was less than 50 kilometers from the oldest of the colonial settlements but it might as well have been 50 light-years away. No native ships were to put in at the island while *Los Angeles* crewmen or farcaster workmen were present. The Maui-Covenant colonists had a few ancient skimmers still in working order, but by mutual agreement there would be no overflights. Except for the dormitories, swimming beach, and the duty-free store, there was little on the island to interest us Shipmen. Some day, when the last components had been brought in-system by the *Los Angeles* and the farcaster finished, Hegemony officials would make Island 241 into a center for trade and tourism. Until then it was a primitive place with a dropship grid, newly finished buildings of the local white stone, and a few bored maintenance people. Mike checked the two of us out for three days of backpacking on the steepest and most inaccessible end of the little island.

"I don't want to go backpacking, for Chrissake," I said. "I'd rather stay on the *L.A.* and plug into a stimsim."

"Shut up and follow me," said Mike, and like a lesser member of the pantheon following an older and wiser deity, I had shut up and followed. Two hours of heavy tramping up the slopes through sharp-branched scrubtrees brought us to a lip of lava several hundred meters above the crashing surf. We were near the equator on a mostly tropical world but on this exposed ledge the wind was howling and my teeth were chattering. The sunset was a red smear between dark cumulus to the west and I had no wish to be out in the open when full night descended.

"Come on," I said. "Let's get out of the wind and build a fire. I don't know how the hell we're going to set up a tent on all of this rock."

Mike sat down and lit a cannabis stick. "Take a look in your pack, kid."

I hesitated. His voice had been neutral but it was the flat neutrality of the practical joker's voice just before the bucket of water descends. I crouched down and began pawing through the nylon sack. The pack was empty except for old flowfoam packing cubes to fill it out. Those and a harlequin's costume complete with mask and bells on the toes.

"Are you . . . is this . . . are you goddamn *crazy*?" I spluttered. It was getting dark quickly now. The storm might or might not pass to the south of us. The surf was rasping below like a hungry

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beast. If I had known how to find my own way back to the trade compound in the dark, I might have considered leaving Mike Osho's remains to feed the fishes far below.

"Now look at what's in my pack," he said. Mike dumped out some flowfoam cubes and then removed some jewelry of the type I'd seen hand-crafted on Renaissance, an inertial compass, a laser pen which might or might not be labelled a concealed weapon by Ship Security, another harlequin costume—this one tailored to his more rotund form—and a hawking mat.

"Jesus, Mike," I said while running my hand over the exquisite design of the old carpet, "this can't be legal."

"I didn't notice any customs agents back there," grinned Mike. "And I seriously doubt that the locals have any traffic control ordinances."

"Yes, but. . . ." I trailed off and unrolled the rest of the mat. It was a little more than a meter wide and about two meters long. The rich fabric had faded with age but the flight threads were still as bright as new copper. "Where did you get it?" I asked. "Does it still work?"

"On Garden," said Mike and stuffed my costume and his other gear into his backpack. "Yes, it does."

It had been more than a century since old Vladimir Sholokov, Old Earth emmigrant, master lepidopterist, and E-M systems engineer, had hand-crafted the first hawking mat for his beautiful young niece on Nova Terra. Legend had it that the niece had scorned the gift but over the decades the toys had become almost absurdly popular—more with rich adults than with children—until they were outlawed on most Hegemony worlds. Dangerous to handle, a waste of shielded monofilaments, almost impossible to deal with in controlled airspace, hawking mats had become curiosities reserved for bedtime stories, museums, and a few colony worlds.

"It must have cost you a fortune," I said.

"Thirty marks," said Mike and settled himself on the center of the carpet. "The old dealer in Carvnal Marketplace thought it was worthless. It was . . . for him. I brought it back to the ship, charged it up, reprogrammed the inertia chips, and *voila!*" Mike palmed the intricate design and the mat stiffened and rose fifteen centimeters above the rock ledge.

I stared doubtfully. "All right," I said, "but what if it . . ."

"It won't," said Mike and impatiently patted the carpet behind him. "It's fully charged. I know how to handle it. Come on, climb

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on or stand back. I want to get going before that storm gets any closer."

"But I don't think . . ."

"Come *on,* Merin. Make up your mind. I'm in a hurry."

I hesitated for another second or two. If we were caught leaving the island, we would both be kicked off the ship. Shipwork was my life now. I had made that decision when I accepted the eight-mission Maui-Covenant contract. More than that, I was two hundred light-years and five-and-a-half leap years from civilization. Even if they brought us back to Hegemony-space, the round trip would have cost us eleven years worth of friends and family. The time-debt was irrevocable.

I crawled on the hovering hawking mat behind Mike. He stuffed the backpack between us, told me to hang on, and tapped at the flight designs. The mat rose five meters above the ledge, banked quickly to the left and shot out over the alien ocean. Three hundred meters below us, the surf crashed whitely in the deepening gloom. We rose higher above the rough water and headed north into the night.

In such seconds of decision entire futures are made.

I remember talking to Siri during our Second Reunion, shortly after we first visited the villa along the coast near Fevarone. We were walking along the beach. Aloń had been allowed to stay in the city under Magritte's supervision. It was just as well. I was not truly comfortable with the boy. Only the undeniable green solemnity of his eyes and the disturbing mirror-familiarity of his short, dark curls and snub nose served to tie him to me . . . to us . . . in my mind. That and the quick, almost sardonic smile I would catch him hiding from Siri when she reprimanded him. It was a smile too cynically amused and self-observant to be so practiced in a ten-year-old. I knew it well. I would have thought such things were learned, not inherited.

"You know very little," Siri said to me. She was wading, shoeless, in a shallow tidepool. From time to time she would lift the delicate shell of a frenchhorn-conch, inspect it for flaws, and drop it back into the silty water.

"I've been well-trained," I replied.

"Yes, I'm sure you've been well-trained," agreed Siri. "I know you are quite skillful, Merin. But you *know* so little."

Irritated, unsure of how to respond, I walked along with my head lowered. I dug a white lavastone out of the sand and tossed it far out into the bay. Rain-clouds were piling along the eastern

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horizon. I found myself wishing that I was back aboard the ship. I had been reluctant to return this time and now I knew that it had been a mistake. It was my third visit to Maui-Covenant, our Second Reunion as the poets and her people were calling it. I was five months away from being 21 standard years old. Siri had just celebrated her thirty-seventh birthday three weeks earlier.

"I've been to a lot of places you've never seen," I said at last. It sounded petulant and childish even to me.

"Oh, yes," said Siri and clapped her hands together. For a second, in her enthusiasm, I glimpsed my other Siri—the young girl I had dreamed about during the long nine months of turn-around. Then the image slid back to harsh reality and I was all too aware of her short hair, the loosening neck muscles, and the cords appearing on the backs of those once beloved hands. "You've been to places I'll *never* see," said Siri in a rush. Her voice was the same. Almost the same. "Merin, my love, you've already seen things I cannot even imagine. You probably know more facts about the universe than I would guess exist. But you *know* very little, my darling."

"What the hell are you talking about, Siri?" I sat down on a half-submerged log near the strip of wet sand and drew my knees up like a fence between us.

Siri strode out of the tidepool and came to kneel in front of me. She took my hands in hers and although mine were bigger, heavier, blunter of finger and bone, I could feel the *strength* in hers. I imagined it as the strength of years I had not shared. "You have to live to really know things, my love. Having Alón has helped me to understand that. There is something about raising a child that helps to sharpen one's sense of what is real."

"How do you mean?"

Siri squinted away from me for a few seconds and absently brushed back a strand of hair. Her left hand stayed firmly around both of mine. "I'm not sure," she said softly. "I think one begins to feel when things aren't *important*. I'm not sure how to put it. When you've spent thirty years entering rooms filled with strangers, you feel less pressure than when you've had only half that number of years of experience. You know what the room and the people in it probably hold for you and you go looking for it. If it's not there, you sense it earlier and leave to go about your business. You just *know* more about what is, what isn't, and how little time there is to learn the difference. Do you understand, Merin? Do you follow me even a little bit?"

"No," I said.

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Siri nodded and bit her lower lip. But she did not speak again for awhile. Instead, she leaned over and kissed me. Her lips were dry and a little questioning. I held back for a second, seeing the sky beyond her, wanting time to think. But then I felt the warm intrusion of her tongue and closed my eyes. The tide was coming in behind us. I felt a sympathetic warmth and rising as Siri unbuttoned my shirt and ran sharp fingernails across my chest. There was a second of emptiness between us and I opened my eyes in time to see her unfastening the last buttons on the front of her white dress. Her breasts were larger than I remembered, heavier, the nipples broader and darker. The chill air nipped at both of us until I pulled the fabric down her shoulders and brought our upper bodies together. We slid down along the log to the warm sand. I pressed her closer, all the while wondering how I possibly could have thought her the stronger one. Her skin tasted of salt.

Siri's hands helped me. Her short hair pressed back against bleached wood, white cotton, and sand. My pulse outraced the surf.

"Do you understand, Merin?" she whispered to me seconds later as her warmth connected us.

"Yes," I whispered back. But I did not.

Mike brought the hawking mat in from the east toward Firstsite. The flight had taken over an hour in the dark and I had spent most of the time huddling from the wind and waiting for the carpet to fold up and tumble us both into the sea. We were still half an hour out when we saw the first of the motile isles. Racing before the storm, treesails billowing, the islands sailed up from their southern feeding grounds in seemingly endless procession. Many were lit brilliantly, festooned with colored lanterns and shifting veils of gossamer light.

"You sure this is the way?" I shouted.

"Yes," shouted Mike. He did not turn his head. The wind whipped his long, black hair back against my face. From time to time he would check his compass and make small corrections to our course. It might have been easier to follow the isles. We passed one—a large one almost half a kilometer in length—and I strained to make out details but the isle was dark except for the glow of its phosphorescent wake. Dark shapes cut through the milky waves. I tapped Mike on the shoulder and pointed.

"Dolphins!" he shouted. "That's what this colony was all about, remember? A bunch of do-gooders during the Hegira wanted to save all the mammals in Old Earth's oceans. Didn't succeed."

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I would have shouted another question but at that moment the headland and Firstsite Harbor came into view.

I had thought the stars were bright above Maui-Covenant. I had thought the migrating islands were memorable in their colorful display. But the city of Firstsite, wrapped about with harbor and hills, was a blazing beacon in the night. Its brilliance reminded me of a torchship I once had watched while it created its own plasma nova against the dark limb of a sullen gas giant. The city was a five-tiered honeycomb of white buildings, all illuminated by warmly glowing lanterns from within and by countless torches from without. The white lavastone of the volcanic island itself seemed to glow from the city light. Beyond the town were tents, pavillions, campfires, cooking fires, and great flaming pyres, too large for function, too large for anything except to serve as a welcome to the returning isles.

The harbor was filled with boats: bobbing catamarans with cowbells clanking from their masts; large-hulled, flat-bottomed houseboats built for creeping from port to port in the calm, equatorial shallows but proudly ablaze with strings of lights this night; and then the occasional ocean-going yacht, sleek and functional as a shark. A lighthouse set out on the pincer's end of the harbor reef threw its beam far out to sea, illuminated wave and isle alike, and then swept its light back in to catch the colorful bobbing of ships and men.

Even from two kilometers out we could hear the noise. Sounds of celebration were clearly audible. Above the shouts and constant susurration of the surf rose the unmistakable notes of a Bach flute sonata. I learned later that this welcoming chorus was transmitted through hydrophones to the Passage Channels where dolphins leapt and cavorted to the music.

"My God, Mike, how did you know all of this was going on?"

"I asked the main ship computer," said Mike. The hawking mat banked right to keep us far out from the ships and lighthouse beam. Then we curved back in north of Firstsite toward a dark spit of land. I could hear the soft booming of waves on the shallows ahead. "They have this festival every year," Mike went on, "but this is their sesquicentennial. The party's been going on for three weeks now and is scheduled to continue another two. There are only about 100,000 colonists on this whole world, Merin, and I bet half of them are here partying."

We slowed, came in carefully, and touched down on a rocky outcropping not far from the beach. The storm had missed us to the south but intermittent flashes of lightning and the distant

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lights of advancing isles still marked the horizon. Overhead, the stars were not dimmed by the glow from Firstsite just over the rise from us. The air was warmer here and I caught the scent of orchards on the breeze. We folded up the hawking mat and hurried to get into our harlequin costumes. Mike slipped his laser pen and jewelry into loose pockets.

"What are those for?" I asked as we secured the backpack and hawking mat under a large boulder.

"These?" asked Mike as he dangled a Renaissance necklace from his fingers. "These are currency in case we have to negotiate for favors."

"Favors?"

"Favors," repeated Mike. "A lady's *largesse*. Comfort to a weary spacefarer. Nooky to you, kid."

"Oh," I said and adjusted my mask and fool's cap. The bells made a soft sound in the dark.

"Come on," said Mike. "We'll miss the party." I nodded and followed him, bells jangling, as we picked our way over stone and scrub toward the waiting light.

I sit here in the sunlight and wait. I am not totally certain what I am waiting for. I can feel a growing warmth on my back as the morning sunlight is reflected from the white stone of Siri's tomb.

Siri's tomb?

There are no clouds in the sky. I raise my head and squint skyward as if I might be able to see the *L.A.* and the newly finished farcaster array through the glare of atmosphere. I cannot. Part of me knows that they have not risen yet. Part of me knows to the second the time remaining before ship and farcaster complete their transit to the zenith. Part of me does not want to think about it.

Siri, am I doing the right thing?

There is the sudden sound of pennants stirring on their staffs as the wind comes up. I sense rather than see the restlessness of the waiting crowd. For the first time since my planetfall for this, our Sixth Reunion, I am filled with sorrow. No, not sorrow, not yet, but a sharptoothed sadness which soon will open into grief. For years I have carried on silent conversations with Siri, framing questions to myself for future discussion with her, and it suddenly strikes me with cold clarity that we will never again sit together and talk. An emptiness begins to grow inside me.

Should I let it happen, Siri?

There is no response except for the growing murmurs of the

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crowd. In a few minutes they will send Donel, my younger and surviving son, or his daughter Lira up the hill to urge me on. I toss away the sprig of willowgrass I've been chewing on. There is a hint of a shadow on the horizon. It could be a cloud. Or it could be the first of the isles, driven by instinct and the spring northerlies to migrate back to the great band of the equatorial shallows from whence they came. It does not matter.

Siri, am I doing the right thing?

There is no answer and the time grows shorter.

Sometimes Siri seemed so ignorant it made me sick.

She knew nothing of my life away from her. She would ask questions but I sometimes wondered if she was interested in the answers. I spent many hours explaining the beautiful physics behind our C-plus spinships but she never did seem to understand. Once, after I had taken great care to detail the differences between their ancient seedship and the *Los Angeles*, Siri astounded me by asking, "But why did it take my ancestors 80 years of shiptime to reach Maui-Covenant when you can make the trip in 130 *days*?" She had understood nothing.

Siri's sense of history was, at best, pitiful. She viewed the Hegemony and the worldweb the way a child would view the fantasy world of a pleasant but rather silly myth; there was an indifference there that almost drove me mad at times.

Siri knew all about the early days of the Hegira—at least insofar as they pertained to the Maui Covenant and the colonists—and she occasionally would come up with delightful bits of archaic trivia or phraseology, but she knew nothing of post-Hegira realities. Names like Garden and Ouster, Renaissance and Lusus meant little to her. I could mention Salmen Brey or General Horace Glennon-Hight and she would have no associations or reactions at all. None.

The last time I saw Siri she was 70 standard years old. She was *70 years old* and still she had never: traveled offworld, used a comlog, tasted any alcoholic drink except wine, interfaced with an empathy surgeon, stepped through a farcaster door, smoked a cannabis stick, received gene tailoring, plugged into a stimsim, received any formal schooling, taken any RNA medication, heard of Zen Christianity, or flown any vehicle except an ancient Vikken skimmer belonging to her family.

Siri had never made love to anyone except me. Or so she said. And so I believed.

* * *

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It was during our First Reunion, that time on the Archipelago, when Siri took me to talk with the dolphins.

We had risen to watch the dawn. The highest levels of the treehouse were a perfect place from which to watch the eastern sky pale and fade to morning. Ripples of high cirrus turned to rose and then the sea itself grew molten as the sun lifted above the flat horizon.

"Let's go swimming," said Siri. The rich, horizontal light bathed her skin and threw her shadow four meters across the boards of the platform.

"I'm too tired," I said. "Later." We had lain awake most of the night talking, making love, talking, and making love again. In the glare of morning I felt empty and vaguely nauseated. I sensed the slight movement of the isle under me as a tinge of vertigo, a drunkard's disconnection from gravity.

"No, let's go now," said Siri and grasped my hand to pull me along. I was irritated but did not argue. Siri was 26, seven years older than me during that First Reunion, but her impulsive behavior often reminded me of the teen-aged Siri I had carried away from the Festival only ten of my months earlier. Her deep, unselfconscious laugh was the same. Her green eyes cut as sharply when she was impatient. The long mane of auburn hair had not changed. But her body had ripened, filled out with a promise which had been only hinted at before. Her breasts were still high and full, almost girlish, bordered above by freckles that gave way to a whiteness so translucent that a gentle blue tracery of veins could be seen. But they were *different* somehow. She was different.

"Are you going to join me or just sit there staring?" asked Siri. She had slipped off her caftan as we came out onto the lowest deck. Our small ship was still tied to the dock. Above us, the island's treesails were beginning to open to the morning breeze. For the past several days, Siri had insisted on wearing swimstrips when we went into the water. She wore none now. Her nipples rose in the cool air.

"Won't we be left behind?" I asked, squinting up at the flapping treesails. On previous days we had waited for the doldrums in the middle of the day when the isle was still in the water, the sea a glazed mirror. Now the jibvines were beginning to pull taut as the thick leaves filled with wind.

"Don't be silly," said Siri. "We could always catch a keelroot and follow it back. That or a feeding tendril. Come on." She tossed an osmosis mask at me and donned her own. The transparent film made her face look slick with oil. From the pocket of her

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caftan she lifted a thick medallion and set it in place around her neck. The metal looked dark and ominous against her skin.

"What's that?" I asked.

Siri did not lift the osmosis mask to answer. She set the comthreads in place against her neck and handed me the hearplugs. Her voice was tinny. "Translation disk," she said. "Thought you knew all about gadgets, Merin. Last one in's a seaslug." She held the disk in place between her breasts with one hand and stepped off the isle. I could see the pale globes of her buttocks as she pirouetted and kicked for depth. In seconds she was only a white blur deep in the water. I slipped my own mask on, pressed the comthreads tight, and stepped into the sea.

The bottom of the isle was a dark stain on a ceiling of crystalline light. I was wary of the thick feeding tendrils even though Siri had amply demonstrated that they were interested in devouring nothing larger than the tiny zooplankton that even now caught the sunlight like dust in an abandoned ballroom. Keelroots descended like gnarled stalactites for hundreds of meters into the purple depths.

The isle was moving. I could see the faint fibrilation of the tendrils as they trailed along. A wake caught the light ten meters above me. For a second I was choking, the gel of the mask smothering me as surely as the surrounding water would, and then I relaxed and the air flowed freely into my lungs.

"Deeper, Merin," came Siri's voice. I blinked—a slow motion blink as the mask readjusted itself over my eyes—and caught sight of Siri twenty meters lower, grasping a keelroot and trailing effortlessly above the colder, deeper currents where the light did not reach. I thought of the thousands of meters of water under me, of the things which might lurk there, unknown, unsought-out by the human colonists. I thought of the dark and the depths and my scrotum tightened involuntarily.

"Come on down." Siri's voice was an insect buzz in my ears. I rotated and kicked. The buoyancy here was not so great as in Old Earth's seas, but it still took energy to dive so deep. The mask compensated for depth and nitrogen but I could feel the pressure against my skin and ears. Finally I quit kicking, grabbed a keelroot, and roughly hauled myself down to Siri's level.

We floated side by side in the dim light. Siri was a spectral figure here, her long hair swirling in a wine-dark nimbus, the pale strips of her body glowing in the blue-green light. The surface seemed impossibly distant. The widening V of the wake and the drift of the scores of tendrils showed that the isle was moving

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more quickly now, moving mindlessly to other feeding grounds, distant waters.

"Where are the . . ." I began to subvocalize.

"Shhh," said Siri. She fiddled with the medallion. I could hear them then; the shrieks and trills and whistles and cat purrs and echoing cries. The depths were suddenly filled with strange music.

"Jesus," I said and because Siri had turned our comthreads to the translator, the word was broadcast as a senseless whistle and toot.

"Hello!" she called and the translated greeting echoed from the transmitter; a high-speed bird's call sliding into the ultrasonic. "Hello!" she called again.

Minutes passed before the dolphins came to investigate. They rolled past us, surprisingly large, alarmingly large, their skin looking slick and muscled in the uncertain light. A large one swam within a meter of us, turning at the last moment so that the white of his belly curved past us like a wall. I could see the dark eye rotate to follow me as he passed. One stroke of his wide fluke kicked up a turbulence strong enough to convince me of the animal's power.

"Hello," called Siri but the swift form faded into distant haze and there was a sudden silence. Siri clicked off the translator. "Do you want to talk to them?" she asked.

"Sure." I was dubious. More than three centuries of effort had not raised much of a dialogue between man and sea-mammal. Mike had once told me that the thought structures of Old Earth's two groups of orphans were too different, the referents too few. One pre-Hegira expert had written that speaking to a dolphin or porpoise was about as rewarding as speaking to a one-year-old human infant;both sides usually enjoyed the exchange and there was a simulacrum of conversation, but neither party would come away the more knowledgeable. Siri switched the translator disk back on. "Hello," I said.

There was a final minute of silence and then our earphones were buzzing while the sea echoed shrill ululations.

distance/no-fluke/hello-tone?/current pulse/circle me/funny?

"What the hell?" I asked Siri and the translator trilled out my question. Siri was grinning under her osmosis mask.

I tried again. "Hello! Greeting from . . . uh . . . the surface. How are you?"

The large male . . . I assumed it to be a male . . . curved in toward us like a torpedo. He arch-kicked his way through the water ten times faster than I could have swum even if I had

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remembered to don flippers that morning. For a second I thought he was going to ram us and I raised my knees and clung tightly to the keelroot. Then he was past us, climbing for air, while Siri and I reeled from his turbulent wake and the high tones of his shout.

no-fluke/no-feed/no-swim/no-play/no-fun.

Siri switched off the translator and floated closer. She lightly grasped my shoulders while I held onto the keelroot with my right hand. Our legs touched as we drifted through the warm water. A school of tiny, crimson warriorfish flickered above us while the dark shapes of the dolphins circled further out.

"Had enough?" she asked. Her hand was flat on my chest.

"One more try," I said. Siri nodded and twisted the disk to life. She slid her arm around me.

"Why do you herd the islands?" I asked the bottle-nosed shapes circling in the dappled light. "How does it benefit you to stay with the isles?"

sounding now/old song/deep water/ no-Great Voices/ no-Shark/old songs/new songs.

Siri's body lay along the length of me now. Her left arm tightened around me. "Great Voices were the whales." she whispered. Her hair fanned out in streamers. Her right hand moved down and seemed surprised at what it found.

"Do you miss the Great Voices?" I asked the shadows. There was no response. Siri slid her legs around my hips. The surface was a churning bowl of light forty meters above us.

"What do you miss most of Old Earth's oceans?" I asked. With my left arm I pulled Siri closer, slid my hand down along the curve of her back to where her buttocks rose to meet my palm, held her tight. To the circling dolphins we must have appeared a single creature. Siri lifted herself against me and we became a single creature.

The translator disk had twisted around so it trailed over Siri's shoulder. I reached to shut it off but paused as the answer to my question buzzed urgently in our ears.

miss Shark/miss Shark/miss Shark/miss Shark/Shark/ Shark/ Shark.

I turned off the disk and shook my head. I did not understand. There was so much I did not understand. I closed my eyes as Siri and I moved gently to the rhythms of the current and ourselves while the dolphins swam nearby and the cadence of their calls took on the sad, slow trilling of an old lament.

* * *

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I sit here in the sunlight and wait. Now that I have made my decision, I wonder if it is what Siri wanted all along.

The tomb is a white glare behind me. The sunlight touches my skin. I can hear a low murmur from the restless crowd on the hillside. Several of the council members are conferring with Donel. Soon he will climb the slope to urge me on. The farcaster ceremonies cannot wait for me.

Is this what you wanted, Siri?

I desperately want to talk to her now. I want to ask her who it was who so deftly crafted and shaped the legend that was our love.

Was it you, Siri? Could a not-quite sixteen-year-old have planned so far ahead?

Surf breaks against the lavastone seawall. I can hear the bells ringing as the small boats bob at anchorage. I sit in the sunlight and wait.

Where were you when I awoke that first time, Siri?

Somewhere to the south a Thomas Hawk screams. There is no other answer.

Siri and I came down out of the hills and returned to the Festival just before sunrise of the second day. For a night and a day we had roamed the hills, eaten with strangers in pavillions of orange silk, bathed together in the icy waters of the Shree, and danced to the music which never ceased going out to the endless file of passing isles. We were hungry. I had awakened at sunset to find Siri gone. She returned before the moon of Maui-Covenant rose. She told me that her parents had gone off with friends for several days on a slow-moving houseboat. They had left the family skimmer in Firstsite. Now we worked our way from dance to dance, bonfire to bonfire, back to the center of the city. We planned to fly west to her family estate near Fevarone.

It was very late but Firstsite Common still had its share of revelers. I was very happy. I was nineteen and I was in love and the .93 gravity of Maui-Covenant seemed much less to me. I could have flown had I wished. I could have done anything.

We had stopped at a booth and bought fried dough and mugs of black coffee. Suddenly a thought struck me. I asked, "How did you know I was a Shipman?"

"Hush, friend Merin. Eat your poor breakfast. When we get to the villa, I will fix a true meal to break our fast."

"No, I'm serious," I said and wiped grease off my chin with the sleeve of my less-than-clean harlequin's costume. "This morning

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you said that you knew right away last night that I was from the ship. Why was that? Was it my accent? My costume? Mike and I saw other fellows dressed like this."

Siri laughed and brushed back her hair. "Just be glad it was I who spied you out, Merin my love. Had it been my Uncle Gresham or his friends it would have meant trouble."

"Oh? Why is that?" I picked up one more fried ring and Siri paid for it. I followed her through the thinning crowd. Despite the motion and the music all about, I felt weariness beginning to work on me.

"They are Separatists," said Siri. "Uncle Gresham recently gave a speech before the All Thing urging that we fight rather than agree to be swallowed into your Hegemony. He said that we should destroy your farcaster device before it destroys us."

"Oh?" I said. "Did he say how he was going to do that? The last I heard you folks had no craft to get offworld in."

"Nay, nor for the past fifty years have we," said Siri. "But it shows how irrational the Separatists can be."

I nodded. Shipmaster Singh and Councillor Halmyn had briefed us on the so-called Separatists of Maui-Covenant. "The usual coalition of colonial jingoists and throwbacks," Singh had said. "Another reason we go slowly and develop the world's trade potential before finishing the farcaster. The worldweb doesn't need these yahoos coming in prematurely. And groups like the Separatists are another reason to keep you crew and construction workers the hell away from the groundlings."

"Where is your skimmer?" I asked. The Common was emptying quickly. Most of the bands had packed up their instruments for the night. Gaily costumed heaps lay snoring on the grass or cobblestones amid the litter and unlit lanterns. Only a few enclaves of merriment remained, groups dancing slowly to a lone guitar or singing drunkenly to themselves. I saw Mike Osho at once, a patchworked fool, his mask long gone, a girl on either arm. He was trying to teach the hora to a rapt but inept circle of admirers. One of the troupe would stumble and they would all fall down. Mike would flog them to their feet among general laughter and they would start again, hopping clumsily to his bass-profundo chant.

"There it is," said Siri and pointed to a short line of skimmers parked behind the Common Hall. I nodded and waved to Mike but he was too busy hanging on to his two ladies to notice me. Siri and I had crossed the square and were in the shadows of the old building when the shout went up.

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"Shipman! Turn around, you Hegemony son-of-a-bitch."

I froze and then wheeled around with fists clenched but no one was near me. Six young men had descended the steps from the grandstand and were standing in a semi-circle behind Mike. The man in front was tall, slim, and strikingly handsome. He was twenty-five or twenty-six years old and his long blonde curls spilled down on a crimson silk suit that emphasized his physique. In his right hand he carried a meter-long sword that looked to be of tempered steel.

Mike turned slowly. Even from a distance I could see his eyes sobering as he surveyed the situation. The women at his side and a couple of the young men in his group tittered as if something humorous had been said. Mike allowed the innebriated grin to stay on his face. "You address me, sir?" he asked.

"I address you, you Hegemony whore's son," hissed the leader of the group. His handsome face was twisted into a sneer.

"Bertol," whispered Siri. "My cousin. Gresham's younger son." I nodded and stepped out of the shadows. Siri caught my arm.

"That is twice you have referred unkindly to my mother, sir," slurred Mike. "Have she or I offended you in some way? If so, a thousand pardons." Mike bowed so deeply that the bells on his cap almost brushed the ground. Members of his group applauded.

"Your presence offends me, you Hegemony bastard. You stink up our air with your fat carcass."

Mike's eyebrows rose comically. A young man near him in a fish costume waved his hand. "Oh, come on, Bertol. He's just . . ."

"Shut up, Ferick. It is this fat shithead I am speaking to."

"Shithead?" repeated Mike, eyebrows still raised. "I've traveled 200 light years to be called a fat shithead? It hardly seems worth it." He pivoted gracefully, untangling himself from the women as he did so. I would have joined Mike then but Siri clung tightly to my arm, whispering unheard entreaties. When I was free I saw that Mike was still smiling, still playing the fool. But his left hand was in his baggy shirt pocket.

"Give him your blade, Creg," snapped Bertol. One of the younger men tossed a sword hilt-first to Mike. Mike watched it arc by and clang loudly on the cobblestones.

"You can't be serious," said Mike in a soft voice that was suddenly quite sober. "You cretinous cowturd. Do you really think I'm going to play duel with you just because you get a hard-on acting the hero for these yokels?"

"Pick up the sword," screamed Bertol, "or by God I'll carve you

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where you stand." He took a quick step forward. The youth's face contorted with fury as he advanced.

"Fuck off," said Mike. In his left hand was the laser pen.

"No!" I yelled and ran into the light. That pen was used by construction workers to scrawl marks on girders of whiskered alloy.

Things happened very quickly then. Bertol took another step and Mike flicked the green beam across him almost casually. The colonist let out a cry and leaped back; a smoking line of black was slashed diagonally across his silk shirtfront. I hesitated. Mike had the setting as low as it could go. Two of Bertol's friends started forward and Mike swung the light across their shins. One dropped to his knees cursing and the other hopped away holding his leg and hooting.

A crowd had gathered. They laughed as Mike swept off his fool's cap in another bow. "I thank you," said Mike. "My mother thanks you."

Siri's cousin strained against his rage. Froths of spittle spilled on his lips and chin. I pushed through the crowd and stepped between Mike and the tall colonist.

"Hey, it's all right," I said "We're leaving. We're going now."

"Goddam it, Merin, get out of the way," said Mike.

"It's all right," I said as I turned to him. "I'm with a girl named Siri who has a . . ." Bertol stepped forward and lunged past me with his blade. I wrapped my left arm around his shoulder and flung him back. He tumbled heavily onto the grass.

"Oh, shit," said Mike as he backed up several paces. He looked tired and a little disgusted as he sat down on a stone step. "Aw, *damn,*" he said softly. There was a short line of crimson in one of the black patches on the left side of his harlequin costume. As I watched, the narrow slit spilled over and blood ran down across Mike Osho's broad belly.

"Oh, Jesus, Mike." I tore a strip of fabric from my shirt and tried to staunch the flow. I could remember none of the first-aid we'd been taught as midShipmen. I pawed at my wrist but my comlog was not there. We had left them on the *Los Angeles.*

"It's not so bad, Mike," I gasped. "It's just a little cut." The blood flowed down over my hand and wrist.

"It will serve," said Mike. His voice was held taut by a cord of pain. "Damn. A fucking sword. Do you believe it, Merin? Cut down in the prime of my prime by a piece of fucking cutlery out of a fucking one-penny opera. Oh, *damn* that smarts."

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"Three-penny opera," I said and changed hands. The rag was soaked.

"You know what your fucking problem is, Merin? You're always sticking your fucking two cents in. Awwwww." Mike's face went white and then gray. He lowered his chin to his chest and breathed deeply. "To *hell* with this, kid. Let's go home, huh?"

I looked over my shoulder. Bertol was slowly moving away with his friends. The rest of the crowd milled around in shock. "Call a doctor!" I screamed. "Get some medics up here!" Two men ran down the street. There was no sign of Siri.

"Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" said Mike in a stronger voice as if he had forgotten something important. "Just a minute," he said and died.

Died. A real death. Brain death. His mouth opened obscenely, his eyes rolled back so only the whites showed, and a minute later the blood ceased pumping from the wound.

For a few mad seconds I cursed the sky. I could see the *L.A.* moving across the fading starfield and I knew that I could bring Mike back if I could get him there in a few minutes. The crowd backed away as I screamed and ranted at the stars.

Eventually I turned to Bertol. "You." I said.

The young man had stopped at the far end of the Common. His face was ashen. He stared wordlessly.

"You." I said again. I picked up the laser pen from where it had rolled, clicked the power to maximum, and walked to where Bertol and his friends stood waiting.

Later, through the haze of screams and scorched flesh, I was dimly aware of Siri's skimmer setting down in the crowded square, of dust flying up all around, and of her voice commanding me to join her. We lifted away from the light and madness. The cool wind blew my sweat-soaked hair away from my neck.

"We will go to Fevarone," said Siri. "Bertol was drunk. The Separatists are a small, violent group. There will be no reprisals. You will stay with me until the All Thing holds the inquest."

"No," I said. "There. Land there." I pointed to a spit of land not far from the city.

Siri landed despite her protests. I glanced at the boulder to make sure the backpack was still there and then climbed out of the skimmer. Siri slid across the seat and pulled my head down to hers. "Merin, my love." Her lips were warm and open but I felt nothing. My body felt anaesthetized. I stepped back and waved her away. She brushed her hair back and stared at me from green

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eyes filled with tears. Then the skimmer lifted, turned, and sped to the south in the early morning light.

Just a minute, I felt like calling. I sat on a rock and gripped my knees as several ragged sobs were torn up out of me. Then I stood and threw the laser pen into the surf below. I tugged out the backpack and dumped the contents on the ground.

The hawking mat was gone.

I sat back down, too drained to laugh or cry or walk away. The sun rose as I sat there. I was still sitting there three hours later when the large, black skimmer from Ship Security set down silently beside me.

"Father? Father, it is getting late."

I turn to see my son Donel standing behind me. He is wearing the blue and gold robe of the Hegemony Council. His bald scalp is flushed and beaded with sweat. Donel is only 43 but he seems much older to me.

"Please, Father," he says. I nod and rise, brushing off the grass and dirt. We walk together to the front of the tomb. The crowd has pressed closer now. Gravel crunches under their feet as they shift restlessly. "Shall I enter with you, Father?" Donel asks.

I pause to look at this aging stranger who is my child. There is little of Siri or me reflected in him. His face is friendly, florid, and tense with the excitement of the day. I can sense in him the open honesty which often takes the place of intelligence in some people. I cannot help but compare this balding puppy of a man to Alón—Alón of the dark curls and silences and sardonic smile. But Alón is 33 years dead, cut down in a stupid battle which had nothing to do with him.

"No," I say. "I'll go in by myself. Thank you, Donel."

He nods and steps back. The pennants snap above the heads of the straining crowd. I turn my attention to the tomb.

The entrance is sealed with a palmlock. I have only to touch it.

During the past few minutes I have developed a fantasy which will save me from both the growing sadness within and the external series of events which I have initiated. Siri is not dead. In the last stages of her illness she had called together the doctors and the few technicians left in the colony and they rebuilt for her one of the ancient hibernation chambers used in their seedship two centuries earlier. Siri is only sleeping. What is more, the year-long sleep has somehow restored her youth. When I wake her she will be the Siri I remember from our early days. We will

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walk out into the sunlight together and when the farcaster doors open we shall be the first through.

"Father?"

"Yes." I step forward and set my hand to the door of the crypt. There is a whisper of electric motors and the white slab of stone slides back. I bow my head and enter Siri's tomb.

"Damn it, Merin, secure that line before it knocks you overboard. Hurry!" I hurried. The wet rope was hard to coil, harder to tie off. Siri shook her head in disgust and leaned over to tie a bowline knot with one hand.

It was our Fifth Reunion. I had been three months too late for her birthday but more than five thousand other people had made it to the celebration. The President of the All Thing had wished her well in a forty-minute speech. A poet read his most recent verses to the Love Cycle Sonnets. The Hegemony Ambassador had presented her with a scroll and a new ship, a small submersible powered by the first fusion-cells to be allowed on Maui-Covenant.

Siri had eighteen other ships. Twelve belonged to her fleet of swift catamarans that plied their trade between the wandering Archipelago and the Home Islands. Two were beautiful racing yachts that were used only twice a year to win the Founder's Regatta and the Covenant Criterium. The other four craft were ancient fishing boats, homely and awkward, well-maintained but little more than scows.

Siri had nineteen ships but we were on a fishing boat—the *Ginnie Paul*. For the past eight days we had fished the shelf of the Equatorial Shallows; a crew of two, casting and pulling nets, wading knee-deep through stinking fish and crunching trilobites, wallowing over every wave, casting and pulling nets, keeping watch, and sleeping like exhausted children during our brief rest periods. I was not quite 23. I thought I was used to heavy labor aboard the *L.A.* and it was my custom to put in an hour of exercise in the 1.3-gee pod every second shift, but now my arms and back ached from the strain and my hands were blistered between the callouses. Siri had just turned 70.

"Merin, go forward and reef the foresail. Do the same for the job and then go below to see to the sandwiches. Plenty of mustard."

I nodded and went forward. For a day and a half we had been playing hide and seek with a storm; sailing before it when we could, turning about and accepting its punishment when we had to. At first it had been exciting, a welcome respite from the endless

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casting and pulling and mending. But after the first few hours the adrenaline rush faded to be replaced by constant nausea, fatigue, and a terrible tiredness. The seas did not relent. The waves grew to six meters and higher. The *Ginnie Paul* wallowed like the broad-beamed matron she was. Everything was wet. My skin was soaked under the three layers of rain gear. For Siri it was a long-awaited vacation.

"This is nothing," she had said during the darkest hour of the night as waves washed over the deck and smashed against the scarred plastic of the cockpit. "You should see it during simoon season."

The clouds still hung low and blended into gray waves in the distance but the sea was down to a gentle five-foot chop. I spread mustard across the roast beef sandwiches and poured steaming coffee into thick, white mugs. It would have been easier to transport the coffee in zero-gee without spilling it than to get it up the pitching shaft of the companionway. Siri accepted her depleted cup without commenting. We sat in silence for a bit, appreciating the food and the tongue-scalding warmth of the coffee. I took the wheel when Siri went below to refill our mugs. The gray day was dimming almost imperceptibly into night.

"Merin," she said after handing me my mug and taking a seat on the long, cushioned bench which encircled the cockpit, "what will happen after they open the farcaster?"

I was surprised by the question. We rarely talked about the time when Maui-Covenant would join the Hegemony. I glanced over at Siri and was shocked by the countenance revealed by the harsh, upward glare of the instrument lights. Siri's face showed a hidden mosaic of seams and shadows which would soon replace the pale, translucent complexion of the woman I had known. Her beautiful, green eyes were hidden in wells of darkness and the cruel light turned her cheekbones into knife-edges against brittle parchment. Siri's gray hair was cut short and now it stuck out in damp spikes. I could see the tendoned cords under the loose skin of her neck and wrists. Age was laying claim to Siri.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"What will happen after they open the farcaster?"

"You know what the Council says." I spoke loudly, as if she were hard of hearing. "It will open a new era of trade and technology for Maui-Covenant. You won't be restricted to one little world any longer. When you become citizens, everyone will be entitled to use the farcaster doors."

"Yes," said Siri. Her voice was weary. "I have heard all of that,

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Merin. But what will *happen?* Who will be the first through to us?"

I shrugged. "More diplomats, I suppose. Cultural contact specialists. Anthropologists. Ethnologists. Marine biologists."

"And then?"

I paused. It was dark out. The sea was almost gentle. Our running lights glowed red and green against the night. I felt the same anxiety I had known two days earlier when the wall of storm appeared on the horizon. I said, "And then will come the missionaries. The petroleum geologists. The sea farmers. The developers."

Siri sipped at her coffee. "I would have thought your Hegemony was far beyond a petroleum economy."

I laughed and locked the wheel in. "Nobody gets beyond a petroleum economy. Not while the petroleum's there. We don't burn it, if that's what you mean. But it's still essential for the production of plastics, synthetics, food base, and keroids. Two hundred billion people use a lot of plastic."

"And Maui-Covenant has oil?"

"Oh, yes," I said. There was no more laughter in me. "There are billions of barrels reservoired under the Equatorial Shallows alone."

"How will they get it, Merin? Platforms?"

"Yeah. Platforms. Submersibles. Sub-sea colonies with tailored workers brought in from Ouster or the Tau Ceti Cities."

"And the motile isles?" asked Siri. "They must return each year to the shallows to feed on the bluekelp there and to reproduce. What will become of the isles?"

I shrugged again. I had drunk too much coffee and it left a bitter taste in my mouth. "I don't know," I said. "They haven't told the crew much. But back on our first trip out, Mike heard that they planned to develop as many of the isles as they can so some will be protected."

"Developed?" Siri's voice showed surprise for the first time. "How can they develop the isles? Even the Founder's Families must ask permission of the Sea Folk to build our treehouse retreats there."

I smiled at Siri's use of the local term for the dolphins. The Maui-Covenant colonists were such children when it came to their damned dolphins. "The plans are all set," I said. "There are 128,573 motile isles big enough to build a dwelling on. Leases to those have long since been sold. The smaller isles will be broken

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up, I suppose. The Home Islands will be developed for recreation purposes.'"

"Recreation purposes," echoed Siri. "How many people from the Hegemony will use the farcaster to come here . . . for recreation purposes?"

"At first, you mean?" I asked. "Just a few thousand the first year. As long as the only door is on Island 241 . . . the Trade Center . . . it will be limited. Perhaps 50,000 the second year when Firstsite gets it door. It'll be quite the luxury tour. Always is after a seed colony is first opened to the web."

"And later?"

"After the five-year probation? There will be thousands of doors, of course. I would imagine that there will be twenty or thirty million new residents coming through during the first year of full citizenship."

"Twenty of thiry million," said Siri. The light from the compass stand illuminated her lined face from below. There was still a beauty there. But there was no anger or shock. I had expected both.

"But you'll be citizens then yourself," I said. "Free to step anywhere in the worldweb. There will be sixteen new worlds to choose from. Probably more by then."

"Yes," said Siri and set aside her empty mug. A fine rain streaked the glass around us. The crude radar screen set in its hand-carved frame showed the seas empty, the storm past. "Is it true, Merin, that people in the Hegemony have their homes on a dozen worlds? One house, I mean, with windows facing out on a dozen skies?"

"Sure," I said. "But not many people. Only the rich can afford multiworld residences like that."

Siri smiled and set her hand on my knee. The back of her hand was mottled and blue-veined. "But you are very rich, are you not, Shipman?"

I looked away. "Not yet I'm not."

"Ah, but soon, Merin, soon. How long for you, my love? Less than two weeks here and then the voyage back to your Hegemony. Five months more of your time to bring the last components back, a few weeks to finish, and then you step home a rich man. *Step* two hundred empty light years home. What a strange thought . . . but where was I? That is how long? Less than a standard year."

"Ten months," I said. "Three hundred and six standard days. Three hundred fourteen of yours. Nine hundred eighteen shifts."

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"And then your exile will be over."

"Yes."

"And you will be 24 years old and very rich."

"Yes."

"I'm tired, Merin. I want to sleep now."

We programmed the tiller, set the collision alarm, and went below. The wind had risen some and the old vessel wallowed from wavecrest to trough with every swell. We undressed in the dim light of the swinging lamp. I was first in the bunk and under the covers. It was the first time Siri and I had shared a sleep period. Remembering our last Reunion and her shyness at the villa, I expected her to douse the light. Instead she stood a minute, nude in the chill air, thin arms calmly at her sides.

Time had claimed Siri but had not ravaged her. Gravity had done its inevitable work on her breasts and buttocks and she was much thinner. I stared at the gaunt outlines of ribs and breastbone and remembered the sixteen-year-old girl with baby fat and skin like warm velvet. In the cold light of the swinging lamp I stared at Siri's sagging flesh and remembered moonlight on budding breasts. Yet somehow, strangely, inexplicably, it was the *same* Siri who stood before me now.

"Move over, Merin." She slipped into the bunk beside me. The sheets were cool against our skin, the rough blanket welcome. I turned off the light. The little ship swayed to the regular rhythm of the sea's breathing. I could hear the sympathetic creak of masts and rigging. In the morning we would be casting and pulling and mending but now there was time to sleep. I began to doze to the sound of waves against wood.

"Merin?"

"Yes?"

"What would happen if the Separatists attacked the Hegemony tourists or the new residents?"

"I thought the Separatists had all been carted off to the isles."

"They have been. But what if they resisted?"

"The Hegemony would send in troops who could kick the shit out of the Separatists."

"What if the farcaster itself were attacked . . . destroyed before it was operational?"

"Impossible."

"Yes, I know, but what if it were?"

"Then the *Los Angeles* would return nine months later with Hegemony troops who would proceed to kick the shit out of the

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Separatists . . . and anyone else on Maui-Covenant who got in their way."

"Nine months shiptime," said Siri. "Eleven years of our time."

"But inevitable either way," I said. "Let's talk about something else."

"All right," said Siri but we did not speak. I listened to the creak and sigh of the ship. Siri had nestled in the hollow of my arm. Her head was on my shoulder and her breathing was so deep and regular that I thought her to be asleep. I was almost asleep myself when her warm hand slid up my leg and lightly cupped me. I startled even as I began to stir and stiffen. Siri whispered an answer to my unasked question. "No, Merin, one is never really too old. At least not too old to want the warmth and closeness. You decide, my love. I will be content either way."

I decided. Towards the dawn we slept.

The tomb is empty.

"*Donel, come in here!*

He bustles in, robes rustling in the hollow emptiness. The tomb *is* empty. There is no hibernation chamber—I did not truly expect there to be one—but neither is there sarcophagus or coffin. A bright bulb illuminates the white interior. "What the hell is this Donel? I thought this was Siri's tomb."

"It is, Father."

"Where is she interred? Under the floor for Chrissake?"

Donel mops at his brow. I remember that it is his mother I am speaking of. I also remember that he has had almost two years to accustom himself to the idea of her death.

"No one told you?" he asks.

"Told me what?" The anger and confusion is already ebbing. "I was rushed here from the dropship station and told that I was to visit Siri's tomb before the farcaster opening. What?"

"Mother was cremated as per her instructions. Her ashes were spread on the Great South Sea from the highest platform of the family isle."

"Then why this . . . *crypt*?" I watch what I say. Donel is sensitive.

He mops his brow again and glances to the door. We are shielded from the view of the crowd but we are far behind schedule. Already the other members of the Council have had to hurry down the hill to join the other dignitaries on the bandstand. My slow grief this day has been worse than bad timing—it has turned into bad theater.

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"Mother left instructions. They were carried out." He touches a panel on the inner wall and it slides up to reveal a small niche containing a metal box. My name is on it.

"What is that?"

Donel shakes his head. "Personal items Mother left for you. Only Magritte knew the details and she died last winter without telling anyone."

"All right," I say. "Thank you. I'll be out in a moment."

Donel glances at his chronometer. "The ceremony begins in eight minutes. They will activate the farcaster in twenty minutes."

"I know," I say. I *do* know. Part of me knows precisely how much time is left. "I'll be out in a moment."

Donel hesitates and then departs. I close the door behind him with a touch of my palm. The metal box is surprisingly heavy. I set it on the stone floor and crouch beside it. A smaller palmlock gives me access. The lid clicks open and I peer into the container.

"Well, I'll be damned," I say softly. I do not know what I expected—artifacts perhaps, nostalgic mementos of our hundred and three days together—perhaps a pressed flower from some forgotten offering or the frenchhorn conch we dove for off Fevrone. But there are no mementos—not as such.

The box holds a small Steiner-Ginn handlaser, one of the most powerful projection weapons ever made. The accumulator is attached by a powerlead to a small fusion-cell that Siri must have cannibalized from her new submersible. Also attached to the fusion-cell is an ancient comlog, an antique with a solid-state interior and a liquid crystal diskey. The charge indicator glows green.

There are two other objects in the box. One is the translator medallion we had used so long ago. The final object makes me smile ruefully.

"Why you little bitch," I say softly. I know now where Siri had been when I awoke alone that first time in the hills above Firstsite. I shake my head and smile again. "You dear, conniving, little bitch." There, rolled carefully, powerleads correctly attached, lays the hawking mat which Mike Osho had purchased for thirty marks in Carvnal Market.

I leave the hawking mat there, disconnect the comlog, and lift it out. The device is ancient, possibly dating back to pre-Hegira times. I can imagine it being handed down in Siri's family from the seedship generation. I sit cross-legged on the cold stone and

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thumb the diskey. The light in the crypt fades and suddenly Siri is there before me.

They did not throw me off the ship when Mike died. They could have but they did not. They did not leave me to the mercy of provincial justice on Maui-Covenant. They could have but they chose not to. For two days I was held in Security and questioned, once by Shipmaster Singh himself. Then they let me return to duty. For the four months of the long leap back I tortured myself with the memory of Mike's murder. I knew that in my clumsy way I had helped to murder him. I put in my shifts, dreamed my sweaty nightmares, and wondered if they would dismiss me when we reached the web. They could have told me but they chose not to.

They did not dismiss me. I was to have my normal leave in the web but could take no off-Ship R-and-R while in the Maui-Covenant system. In addition, there was a written reprimand and temporary reduction in rank. That was what Mike's life had been worth—a reprimand and reduction in rank.

I took my three-week leave with the rest of the crew but unlike the others I did not plan to return. I farcast to Esperance and made a classic Shipman's mistake of trying to visit family. Two days in the crowded residential hive was enough and I stepped to Lusus and took my pleasure in three days of whoring on the *Rue des Chats*. When my mood turned darker I 'cast to Ouster and lost most of my ready marks betting on the bloody Shrike fights there.

Finally I found myself farcasting to Homesystem Station and taking the two-day pilgrim shuttle down to Hellas Basin. I had never been to Homesystem or Mars before and I never plan to return, but the ten days I spent there, alone and wandering the dusty, haunted corridors of the Monastery, served to send me back to the Ship. Back to Siri.

Occasionally I would leave the red-stoned maze of the megalith and, clad only in skinsuit and mask, stand on one of the uncounted thousands of stone balconies and stare skyward at the pale gray star which had once been Old Earth. Sometimes then I thought of the brave and stupid idealists heading out into the great dark in their slow and leaking ships, carrying embryos and ideologies with equal faith and care. But most times I did not try to think. Most times I simply stood in the purple night and let Siri come to me. There in the Master's Rock, where perfect satori had eluded so many much more worthy pilgrims, I achieved it through the

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memory of a not-quite sixteen-year-old womanchild's body lying next to mine while moonlight spilled from a Thomas Hawk's wings.

When the *Los Angeles* spun back up to a quantum state, I went with her. Four months later I was content to pull my shift with the construction crew, plug into my usual stims, and sleep my R-and-R away. Then Singh came to me. "You're going down," he said. I did not understand. "In the past eleven years the groundlings have turned your screw-up with Osho into a goddamned legend," said Singh. "There's an entire cultural mythos built around your little roll in the hay with that colonial girl."

"What are you talking about?" I asked. I was irritated and frightened. "Are you throwing me off the Ship?"

Singh grunted and brushed idly at his right eyebrow. The gold bracelet on his wrist caught the light. "Did you know that your groundside girlfriend was a member of their original Shipmaster's family?" he asked. "Sort of the local equivalent of royalty."

"Siri?" I said stupidly.

"She told the story of your . . . what shall we call it . . . your love affair to everyone she could. Poems have been written about it. There was a play performed every year on one of those floating islands of theirs. Evidently there's an entire cult that's sprung up. You seem to be at the center of a romantic legend that's caught the imagination of most of the yokels on the planet."

"Are you throwing me off the Ship?"

"Don't be stupid, Aspic," growled Singh. "You'll spend your three weeks of leave groundside. The Hegemony needs this planet. The Ambassador says that we need the cooperation of the groundlings until the farcaster's operational and we get some occupation troops through. If this half-assed, star-crossed-lovers myth can smooth things for us during the next few trips, fine. The experts say you'll do the Hegemony more good down there than up here. We'll see."

"Siri?" I said again.

"Get your gear," ordered Singh. "Your're going down."

The world was waiting. Crowds were cheering. Siri was waving. We left the harbor in a yellow catamaran and sailed south-southeast, bound for the Archipelago and her family isle.

"Hello, Merin." Siri floats in the darkness of her tomb. The holo is not perfect; a haziness mars the edges, But it is Siri—Siri as I last saw her, gray hair shorn rather than cut, head high, face sharpened with shadows. "Hello, Merin my love."

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"I am sorry I cannot share our Sixth Reunion, Merin. I looked forward to it." Siri pauses and looks down at her hands. The image flickers slightly as dust motes float through her form. "I had carefully planned what to say here," she goes on. "How to say it. Arguments to be pled. Instructions to be given. But I know now how useless that would have been. Either I have said it already and you have heard or there is nothing left to say and silence would best suit the moment."

Siri's voice had grown even more beautiful with age. There is a fullness and calmness there which can come only from knowing pain. Siri moves her hands and they disappear beyond the border of the projection. "Merin my love, how strange our days apart and together have been. How beautifully absurd the myth that bound us. My days were but heartbeats to you. I hated you for that. You were the mirror that would not lie. If you could have seen your face at the beginning of each Reunion! The least you could have done was to hide your shock . . . that, at least, you could have done for me.

"But through your clumsy naiveté there has always been . . . what? . . . something, Merin. There is something there that belies the callowness and thoughtless egotism which you wear so well. A caring, perhaps. A *respect* for caring, if nothing else.

"Therein lay the slim basis for so much hope through these long years, Merin. Even through your Hive-born and Ship-bred shallowness there was that sense of caring. I believe . . . no, I *know* that you sometimes cared for me. If you could care for me, you could care for our world. In our brief hours of sharing, you might find an understanding. Therein lay our hope. Therein lay the only possible source of our salvation.

"I confess that I did not plan this when I stole your silly flying carpet. I don't know now *what* I was thinking and planning when I let you lead me from the Festival that first time. Of kidnapping you, perhaps. Of delaying and seducing you until Uncle Gresham could use any information you might have. Perhaps I dreamed even then of your joining us, of both of us swimming free with the Sea Folk and protecting the Covenant together. Then Bertol ruined everything. . . .

"I miss you, Merin. Tonight I will go down to the harbor and watch the stars awhile and think of you. It will not be the first time I have done that.

"I'm sorry that I will not be waiting for you this time, Merin. But our world will be waiting. The seas that I listen to tonight will greet you with the same song. Preserving that song is not

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such an impossible idea, my love. They can't have this world without controlling the isles and the Sea Folk control the isles.

"I've kept this diary since I was thirteen. It has hundreds of entries. By the time you see this, they will all have been erased except the few that follow. Our love was not all myth and machination. We were good friends and some of our times together were sweet, were they not?

"Stay well, Merin. Stay well."

I shut off the comlog and sit in silence for a minute. The crowd sounds are barely audible through the thick walls of the tomb. I take a breath and thumb the diskey.

Siri appears. She is in her late forties. I know immediately the day and place she recorded this image. I remember the cloak she wears, the eelstone pendant at her neck, and the strand of hair which has escaped her barrette and even now falls across her cheek. I remember everything about that day. It was the last day of our Third Reunion and we were with friends on the heights above South Tern. Donel was ten and we were trying to convince him to slide on the snowfield with us. He was crying. Siri turned away from us even before the skimmer settled. When Magritte stepped out we knew from Siri's face that something had happened.

The same face stares at me now. She brushes absently at the unruly strand of hair. Her eyes are red but her voice is controlled. "Merin, they killed our son today. Alón was 21 and they killed him. You were so confused today, Merin. 'How could such a mistake have happened?' you kept repeating. You did not really know our son but I could see the loss in your face when we heard. Merin, it was not an accident. If nothing else survives, no other record, if you never understand why I allowed a sentimental myth to rule my life, let this be known—*it was not an accident that killed Alón.* He was with the Separatists when the Council police arrived. Even then he could have escaped. We had prepared an alibi together. The police would have believed his story. He chose to stay.

"Today, Merin, you were impressed with what I said to the crowd . . . the mob . . . at the embassy. Know this, Shipman—when I said, 'Now is not the time to show your anger and your hatred,' that is precisely what I meant. No more, no less. Today is not the time. But the day will come. It will surely come. The Covenant was not taken lightly in those final days, Merin. It is not taken lightly now. Those who have forgotten will be surprised when the day comes but it will surely come."

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The image fades to another and in the split second of overlap the face of a 26-year-old Siri appears superimposed on the older woman's features. "Merin, I am pregnant. I'm so glad. You've been gone five weeks now and I *miss* you. Ten *years* you'll be gone. More than that. Merin, why didn't you think to invite me to go with you? I could not have gone but I would have loved it if you had just *invited* me. But I'm pregnant, Merin. The doctors say that it will be a boy. I will tell him about you, my love. Perhaps someday you and he will sail in the Archipelago and listen to the songs of the Sea Folk as you and I have done these past few weeks. Perhaps you'll understand them by then. Merin, I *miss* you. Please hurry back."

The holographic image shimmers and shifts. The 16-year-old girl is red-faced. Her long hair cascades over bare shoulders and a white nightgown. She speaks in a rush, racing tears. "Shipman Merin Aspic, I'm sorry about your friend—I really am—but you left without even saying *good-bye*. I had such plans about how you would help us . . . how you and I . . . you didn't even say good-bye. I don't care *what* happens to you. I hope you go back to your stinking, crowded Hegemony hives and rot for all I care. In fact, Merin Aspic, I wouldn't want to see you again even if they paid me. *Good-bye.*"

She turns her back before the projection fades. It is dark in the tomb now but the audio continues for a second. There is a soft chuckle and Siri's voice—I cannot tell the age—comes one last time. "Adieu, Merin. Adieu."

"Adieu," I say and thumb the diskey off.

The crowd parts as I emerge blinking from the tomb. My poor timing has ruined the drama of the event and now the smile on my face incites angry whispers. Loudspeakers carry the rhetoric of the official ceremony even to our hilltop. ". . . beginning a new era of cooperation," echoes the rich voice of the Ambassador.

I set the box on the grass and remove the hawking mat. The crowd presses forward to see as I unroll the carpet. The tapestry is faded but the flight threads gleam like new copper. I sit in the center of the mat and slide the heavy box on behind me.

". . . and more will follow until space and time will cease to be obstacles."

The crowd moves back as I tap the flight design and the hawking mat rises four meters into the air. Now I can see beyond the roof of the tomb. The islands are returning to form the Equatorial Archipelago. I can see them, hundreds of them, borne up out of

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the hungry south by gentle winds.

"So it is with great pleasure that I close this circuit and welcome you, the colony of Maui-Covenant, into the community of the Hegemony of Man."

The thin thread of the ceremonial com-laser pulses to the zenith. There is a spattering of applause and the band begins playing. I squint skyward just in time to see a new star being born. Part of me knew to the microsecond what has just occurred.

For a few microseconds the farcaster had been functional. For a few microseconds time and space *had* ceased to be obstacles. Then the massive tidal pull of the artificial singularity triggered the thermite charge I had placed on the outer containment sphere. That tiny explosion had not been visible but a second later the expanding Swarzchild radius is eating its shell, swallowing thirty-six thousand tons of fragile dodecahedron, and growing quickly to gobble several thousand kilometers of space around it. And *that* is visible—magnificently visible—as a miniature nova flares whitely in the clear blue sky.

The band stops playing. People scream and run for cover. There is no reason to. There is a burst of X-rays tunneling out as the farcaster continues to collapse into itself, but not enough to cause harm through Maui-Covenant's generous atmosphere. A second streak of plasma becomes visible as the *Los Angeles* puts more distance between itself and the rapidly decaying little black hole. The winds rise and the seas are choppier. There will be strange tides tonight.

I want to say something profound but I can think of nothing. Besides, the crowd is in no mood to listen. I tell myself that I can hear some cheers mixed in with the screams and shouts.

I tap at the flight designs and the hawking mat speeds out over the cliff and above the harbor. A Thomas Hawk lazing on mid-day thermals flaps in panic at my approach.

"Let them come!" I shout at the fleeing hawk. "Let them come!" I'll be 35 and not alone and let them come if they dare!" I drop my fist and laugh. The wind is blowing my hair and cooling the sweat on my chest and arms.

Cooler now, I take a sighting and set my course for the most distant of the isles. I look forward to meeting the others. Even more, I look forward to talking to the Sea Folk and telling them that it is time for the Shark to come at last to the seas of Maui-Covenant.

Later, when the battles are won and the world is theirs, I will tell them about her. I will sing to them of Siri. ●

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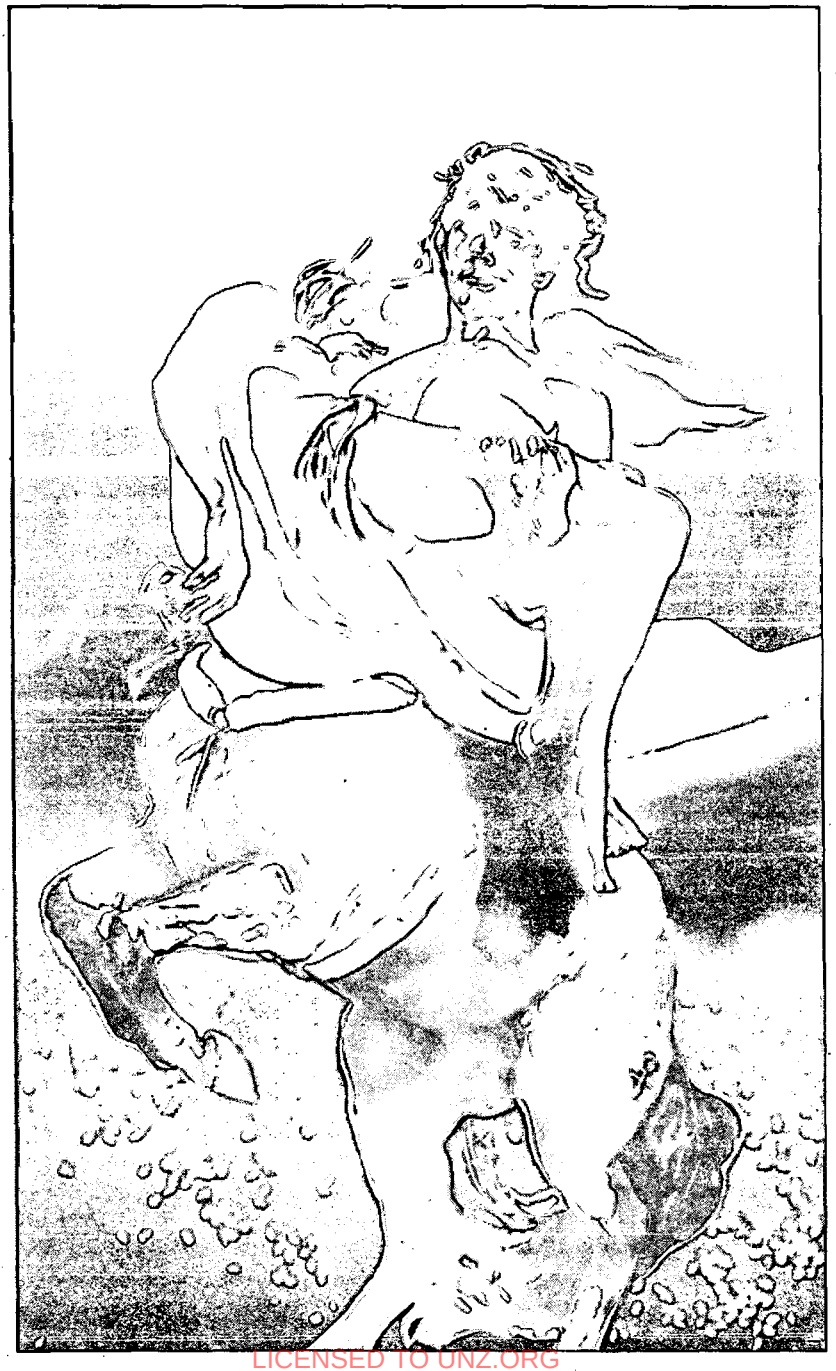

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VIEWPOINT

IN DEFENSE OF FANTASY

by Piers Anthony

Val Lakey Lindahn/Artifact

In our last issue, Charles Platt attacked fantasy in his Viewpoint Article "In Defense of the Real World." Here, then, is the rebuttal/reply by one of the country's best-known, best-selling fantasy (and science fiction) authors.

Readers who regularly peruse
the bestseller lists
cannot help but be familiar
with Piers Anthony's name.
As of this writing,
Juxtaposition (Del Rey) is happily ensconced on the
New York *Times* bestseller list, and marks his third
consecutive appearance there
A new hardcover, *On a Pale Horse*, Book One
in a new series called
"Incarnations of Immortality," (Del Rey) should be
out by the time you read this.

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VIEWPOINT

There were dragons before there was literature, and magic before religion. Man is regarded as the first rational animal, but this itself is fantasy. Reality as we know it is, to a large extent, fantasy.

The philosophies of most people are insidiously influenced by self-interest. Hunters like to believe they are doing nature a favor; polluters are proud of the better life they feel they are generating for mankind; the armament industry thinks it is forwarding the cause of peace in our time. The Nazis claimed they were improving the human species by culling rejects. Examples are legion.

When a person ardently espouses a cause, his true motivation is likely to be self-interest—as he perceives it. Thus we have fantasy being attacked by people who suspect that it threatens their image or livelihood. First comes the gut reaction, then the clothing of logic. If we can fathom the self-interest of these people, we have a better chance to judge the validity of their arguments.

I am no exception. I write both science fiction and fantasy—sometimes in the same novel—so I feel defensive when either genre is criticized, and I strike back. I have a just reputation for being one of the most ornery writers in the business, as this essay will show. Since it has become evident that my fortune lies mostly with fantasy, I tend to react aggressively to remarks disparaging it.

But first we must define our terms. It is difficult to either attack or defend a thing whose nature is fuzzy. My definitions are simple: science fiction is the literature of the possible, while fantasy is the literature of the impossible. In practice the distinction blurs; much of what is labeled science fiction is actually science fantasy, because it incorporates impossible things such as faster-than-light travel and permutations of time, as well as highly implausible things like telekinesis, humanoid aliens, and Bems who lust after

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Femmes. (In reality, Bems lust after Femme-Bems.) Thus science fiction is what a science fiction publisher publishes, and fantasy what a fantasy publisher publishes, regardless of the actual nature of the material.

Now don't assume I'm deploring this. I like all of it, including the fuzzy definitions. I just don't take it too seriously. In a future fantasy novel I feature Bat Durston, the epitome of junk science fiction, as a hero, along with a Bem-Femme. Nothing is sacred to me. I simply want to make the point that when the dung gets thrown at the fantasy fan, more than fantasy is apt to get smirched.

I regard science fiction and fantasy as brother-and-sister subgenres, complementing and supporting each other. Science fiction has male associations, and fantasy female ones; the two sexes do need each other, much as some individuals protest this reality. Boys go for motorcycles and spaceships; girls for horses and unicorns. It all fits so nicely that I wonder whether the anti-fantasy crusade is not a sexist thing. Is the male sexist afraid to condemn women openly, so he sublimates it into a hatred of fantasy? Does the female sexist suffer nightmares of being raped by a science fiction magazine? Perhaps we can elicit some response from the sexists in our midst.

But I don't take this seriously either. You see, the male-female associations themselves are fantasy. The most successful fantasy authors today are males, and the most successful fantasy editor is male. I sell my fantasy to Lester del Rey at Del Rey, and my science fiction to a female editor, Page Cuddy at Avon. However, I am out of touch with the magazines, so the situation may differ there. Is it true that no woman can edit a science fiction magazine? Would any of *you* read such a magazine? I suspect the editor will be interested.

Fantasy parades its incredibilities openly, but they exist in many genres. Does

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VIEWPOINT

"The human creature requires some fantasy for survival. I suspect that no person, stripped of all his illusions, could long survive. I doubt that the universe much cares what happens to any one of us, or to the human species, but as long as we believe we are important, we'll get along. Our fantasies give our lives meeaning.."

anyone really believe the sexual fantasy of the erotic genre, where beautiful women virtually leap spread-legged upon the ever-potent male? (I admit to feeling jealous . . .) Or the six-gun diplomacy of the Westerns, or the confessions of the Romance publications, or the James Bond type-exploits? Consider television: I don't condemn it as a wasteland, because I'm an environmentalist at heart, with a lot of sympathy for wastelands, but I don't believe much of it either. Consider the doublespeak of politics. The fact is, the entire human society is riddled by fantasy, and perhaps necessarily so. We can not extirpate it from ourselves without destroying a significant aspect of our human-ness.

You doubt this? Ah, you force me to get really pointed! There is a pervasive fantasy I wish I could share, and my life is depressed because I am unable to: that of immortality. We all know we are going to die, but most of us choose to pretend that an exception will be made in our own cases. Nature helps shield us from

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the cruel reality in one important respect; we don't know *when*. It is always someone else's turn today. Maybe tomorrow will never come. I believe we need this type of fantasy, because our lives would seem to become pointless without it. We can put this to the test right now: statistically, a number of you who are reading this essay will be dead a year from now. I address this question to those readers: how do you feel about your future? Are you glad to contemplate reality—or would you prefer fantasy?

Likewise, we need our various fantasies of self-image. We need to believe that our lives are in some sense important to the welfare of the universe. With such faith, we can carry on. Yes, certainly this is true for me too; I like to think that my writing, including *this* writing, will have a beneficial impact on others, and that they will remember me with a certain ironic fondness. That's *my* form of immortality.

The human creature requires some fantasy for survival. I suspect that no person, stripped of all his illusions, could long survive. I doubt that the universe much cares what happens to any one of us, or to the human species—but as long as we believe we are important, we'll get along. Our fantasies give our lives meaning.

Literature is, like art, an expression of our human condition. It helps distinguish us from the animals. It will help distinguish extra-terrestrial beings too; I would much rather judge an alien species by its literature than by its chemistry. Our literature is us. And—our literature is suffused with fantasy.

This is a point that needs to be established. Fantasy is no new phenomenon. As far as we know, our oral tradition has been fantastic since man evolved the wit to communicate verbally, and our earliest literature is fantasy, such as *Beowulf*, with magic and monsters and dragons. It continues with the legends of King Arthur, Charlemagne—in fact the entire medieval mythology,

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VIEWPOINT

including the religious fantasy exemplified by Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. It permeates all cultures, as we discover when we read translations of *The Arabian Nights* adventures or the folklore of South Seas Islanders or Chinese stories. It carries right on into modern times, with Grimm's fairy tales and novels by the likes of C.S. Lewis and T.H. White. Children today still graduate from Raggedy Ann to the Land of Oz. I do not sneer at any of this; for one thing, some of those children proceed from Oz to my own light fantasy. More on that anon.

Indeed, fantasy is larger than the written genre; it is in our art, as in the phenomenal paintings of Boris Vallejo and the brothers Hildebrandt; it is in the comics and in role-playing games and computer games. Those comics are not necessarily childish; I don't think any sensible person who reads *Elfquest* carefully will disparage it, and a game of Dungeons and Dragons can be a pretty rigorous group exercise.

What, then, of the thesis presented by my esteemed colleague Charles Platt in the last issue? (The term "Esteemed Colleague" is a fantasy employed by one who is about to torpedo another.) Well, he makes an excellent case, before consuming his foot. He suggests that the world was without form and void until God created Science Fiction, but that the wayward children of the current generation have degenerated into the dread pollution of fantasy, to the detriment of our technological society. He suggests that the rigorous scientific minds of his generation are giving way to the slush of simple let's-pretend in your generation. (I believe I mentioned self-interest.) O, woe, that we have sunk so low! You slush-brains should be ashamed.

The truth, as I clarified above, is that it is science fiction, not fantasy that is the historic newcomer. We have had fantasy for thousands of years, while science fiction is basically a phenomenon of the twentieth century. Now, as we

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reach for the twenty-first century, fantasy is being re-established—and what do you know, the genre is prospering! The barbarians can surge in and conquer the established society, but after a generation or so the fundamental values reassert themselves. The barbarians do gnash their teeth somewhat when this occurs; you see it is their fantasy that they represent a new order, an improvement on the old. (I mentioned the Nazis.) They don't see themselves as imposters. They prefer to believe they are important.

Yes, I am teasing you again. I am a creature of the science fiction age myself. But it helps to have a broadened perspective. Reality is what each person perceives it to be, and it is often wrongheaded to condemn another person's reality, whatever it may be. Let's pursue this alternate perspective just a little farther.

Science fiction had its heyday, roughly, from 1930 to 1970, give or take a decade or so. That heyday was typified by a ghetto syndrome, in which a few dedicated converts skulked about seeking others of their odd kind. It can get very chummy in the ghetto; after all, you have to stick together when the paranoids are out to get you. Science fiction had conquered fantasy—but somehow the abiding popularity of fantasy did not transfer perfectly to the new master. Thus science fiction's victory, like that of a radical faction of a major political party, only cost it the support of the masses. As a ghetto it was great; commercially it was limited. When genre publishers resumed appealing to the masses, the commercial viability returned. That is part of what we are seeing today: best-selling science fiction and fantasy that is not unduly challenging to the intellect.

It is important to grasp the true nature of the phenomenon. Platt believes that modern fantasy is undermining our technological society. It is true that some fantasy is prospering, and that the achievement scores of contemporary students seem

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to be declining, but it is not logical to claim that the first phenomenon causes the second. It is more likely the other way around—and more likely yet that both are symptoms of a more profound change. In that sense, the popularity of fantasy may only signal a deeper shift. To abolish fantasy would be like executing the messenger: it would not solve anything.

I believe that there is a problem, but that Platt has not identified it. He assumes that because fantasy is passing science fiction, fantasy is the enemy. It is not, any more than women are the enemies of men. Bad writing is the enemy, and that is rooted in bad education. The correction of this is a matter that is out of our hands; it has to do with teacher qualification, national priorities, and family attitudes. Perhaps, as some claim, the ready access of television makes it easy for students to tune out genuine learning. I was once an English teacher; I know the problem. I don't know the solution—and in any event, it is beyond the scope of this essay. Our society does have its problems, and they are formidable—but they do not derive from the success of fantasy.

In fact, I suspect that fantasy, far from being part of the problem, is part of the solution. I have what seems to be a fairly rare perspective. Because I do write both science fiction and fantasy, and put the same literary skill into each, I can judge to some extent how the readership reacts to each. It does not matter, for this purpose, whether I am a good, indifferent, or poor writer; my level is reasonably constant. I don't write superlative prose in one genre and slush in the other. It would of course be unfair to compare excellent science fiction to poor fantasy, or fine fantasy to bad science fiction. What we want to know at the moment is whether, other things being equivalent, one genre will do better than the other, and what that signifies. For such a comparison, it is simplest to have a single author doing both; that cancels out the

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distortions of style, reputation, and such. If Isaac Asimov wrote fantasy today, would it outsell his science fiction? Alas, the Good Doctor seems reticent to perform that experiment, so we have to collect our data where we can—and that is Anthony.

A moment while we open the envelope . . . and here is the Answer: the winner is Fantasy. My fantasy does indeed outsell my science fiction. Not by a little; by a lot. By a factor of two to one. Reviews are not so kind—but reviewers don't buy copies. The reading public ignores the reviews and goes for the fantasy. About three quarters of the forty or so novels I have done are non-fantasy, but I have fantasy fans who seem not to know I write anything else, and some who seem not particularly pleased to receive this news. Of course there are many readers who do read and enjoy both, and there are some who like only my science fiction. But my overwhelming clientele, as I judge it by my sales and my fan mail (currently I answer fifty letters per month) is fantasy oriented.

Okay; fine for me. How does this make fantasy part of the solution? Because many of my readers, by their own statements, don't read anything *but* fantasy. They not only come from outside the genre, they come from outside the reading public; some don't read books at all, except for my fantasy. Many of my readers are young—down to eight years old—and I receive some notes from parents thanking me for providing the one type of book these children will voluntarily read. I assume the case is similar with other fantasy writers, though it is true that I write the most juvenile fantasy that can squeeze through the label of "Adult." My fantasy readers are not being stolen from science fiction, and are not degenerating from it; they are new readers, coming up from the cradle.

But then, in many cases, something happens. My young readers, having discovered that some books are, after all, interesting, begin to branch out. It is a giant step, that

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VIEWPOINT

realization that a book without pictures can actually be fun, and a smaller step to other books. They begin to try others, and to discover that other writers can entertain too. They try my science fiction, perhaps first by accident, thinking it is more fantasy; some are turned off, but some become fans of both fantasy and science fiction, and begin to distinguish good writing from bad. It is a growing process. At least they are *reading*—and without fantasy that might not have happened. Without fantasy, the audience for science fiction would be smaller, and there would be fewer readers—of anything!—than there are. And once you have a young person reading, education can follow. To abolish fantasy would be to damage science fiction and our society, not to help them. So maybe these readers do seem juvenile, as a class—they *are* juveniles. But they are on their way *up*, not down. They have time to become the scientists of tomorrow, if they choose, and I don't think fantasy will hinder them any more than passing through grade school hinders a child from moving on to college.

Very well. Having dispatched this nonsense of the supposed hazard fantasy represents to human health, I must still determine why it is now ascending. What turns people on to fantasy instead of to something else?

Is it escapism? That term has been bruited about like an insult, but I don't see it as such. In my youth, my mundane existence was on the whole unpleasant. I was small for my age, I wet my bed, I suffered nervous twitches that made me the object of ridicule, and fear was my most constant companion. I felt that if I could be given a choice between living my life over exactly the way it had been the first time, or opting out entirely, I would choose not to exist. In fairness, I have to say that today I would choose the other way, because my adult life has been immeasurably more rewarding than my youth. I am no longer small for my

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age, I no longer wet my bed, I no longer twitch, and I am about as successful as any writer gets in this genre. But *then* it was bad—and I suspect it is similarly bad for some other folk today.

At the age of thirteen I discovered science fiction. I wish it had been at the age of ten! Suddenly there opened up for me an entire galaxy of alternate worlds, each of which was better than my own. When I got hold of a science fiction magazine—there really was only one decent one in those days—I tuned out the real world entirely. I was in the worlds of Jack Williamson, William Tenn, and someone—I forget his name, but he wrote about robots and Foundations and things; I'm not sure what became of him. Escapism? You bet! It really did help me to survive. It still does; then it cheered my mind, while now it cheers my livelihood. But I still do enjoy reading a good genre novel, and if others enjoy it too, more power to them. So it's escape; it's a sight better than

Photo: *Locus*/Charles N. Brown

"It is science fiction, not fantasy that is the newcomer. We have had fantasy for thousands of years, while science fiction is basically a phenomenon of the twentieth century. Now as we reach for the twenty-first century, fantasy is being re-established—and what do you know, the genre is prospering! The barbarians can surge in and conquer the established society, but after a generation or so the fundamental values reassert themselves."

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zonking out on drugs. Platt thinks it requires a drug-sotted mind to appreciate fantasy, but I see them as alternate modes of escape: drugs are the wrong way, fantasy the right way. Why *not* escape? Any rational person has to feel a deep misgiving as he considers the problems and threats of the contemporary world. The nuclear Sword of Damocles hangs over all our heads. Better to divert ourselves with literal fantasy, than to indulge in the fantasy that we can survive nuclear war.

So it's escapism, or idle entertainment; why does fantasy seem to fill this need better than science fiction does? Well, fantasy is now more available than it was. When I came into the genre in the late '40s, the real action was in science fiction; such fantasy as was printed seemed to consist of whimsy or oddments—artsy stuff I had no patience with. Today the situation is different; the reader is not limited to magazines, but can choose also from thousands of paperback books. It is scarcely surprising that readers have spread out across the horizon, each to his specific tastes. It seems that when given freedom to choose, they gravitate toward fantasy.

Ah, but paperbacks have existed for thirty years—yet the current fantasy phenomenon is a creature of less than ten years. What changed, recently?

Here I have to choke down my pride and agree with Platt. He has pointed out that a number of the big new science fiction movies are actually fantasy, and they have recruited many new readers. He also told how one publisher, Del Rey Books, read the market correctly and went for it—and scored. I think Del Rey was lucky; had they miscalculated, they might well have suffered the fate of those other publishers who guess wrong, and been swallowed whole by a competitor. Publishers today are like a dozen Bems in a bottle, each one eating or being eaten by the others.

Oh, you think they weren't gambling? Fantasy was considered a drug on the

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market when they put into print a quarter-million word novel by an unpublished writer and promoted it desperately: *The Sword of Shannara*. They picked up a massive trilogy that had been bounced forty-seven times by other publishers and did the same: *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant*. They issued a contract for fantasy on the basis of a summary to an ornery science fiction writer who had been banned by Ballantine for six years: that's how Xanth began. Opinions may differ on the merits of these various works, but all of them became bestsellers, and that's the lifeblood of publishing: sales. Del Rey gambled and won; to a considerable extent the current fantasy phenomenon is theirs.

But no publisher can create a market from scratch; it can only capitalize on an existing appetite. Exactly what is this appetite? There's plenty of old-fashioned Sword-and-Sorcery fantasy being published today that doesn't seem to be selling much better than it used to. I harbor a suspicion that fantasy as a whole is not doing better than science fiction; only certain authors and certain series are prospering. I think that if you subtract two leading fantasy authors, the number of fantasies making the mundane bestseller lists (which is where the big money is) would decline by 75 percent. The fantasy phenomenon may after all be more apparent than real.

Ah, but here is another key. If we recognize that there are different types of fantasy, we can zero in on what is really succeeding. The bestselling fantasy is not your standard fare. It does not sport muscular illiterate barbarians and wand-waving wizards and luscious damsels chained out for toasting by dragons. (I miss those luscious damsels!) More likely it features a deeply troubled protagonist who faces decisions of conscience in a complex situation—and makes mistakes. On occasion the evil figure wins; on occasion the heroine gets raped. Contrary to Platt's assessment, the magic does fail, or is

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misunderstood, and the swordsman has serious self-doubts. Whether heavy or light, the new fantasy is qualitatively distinct from the old. Oh, yes, many of the standard elements remain. The new novels are big, running upwards of 100,000 words, and they come in series that seem to have no end; these things help sales a lot. But neither size nor series will attract and hold a large readership without content. And here we get to the essence.

In the good old days, science fiction had, above all else, solid story value. The characters might be cardboard, but they had comprehensible and exciting adventures. The science might be suspect—science fiction is no place to learn science!—but it was mind-stretching. By damn, when you got into Null-A or Foundation or Heyday Heinlein you were on a roller-coaster through the universe. You had Sense of Wonder. Old-fashioned space-opera might be logically ludicrous, but you couldn't put it down. I showed a novel, *The Star Kings*, to my roommate in high school, who was contemptuous of science fiction. He picked it up, started the first page—and put it down hours later, finished. "This stuff is junk!" he proclaimed. But he had to read it at one sitting. That junk really grabbed you—as the *Star Wars* series does today. Same stuff.

But editors got jaded or sick, running reruns of former formulas. Increasingly, as I read, I had the feeling I had read it before. Other genres thrive on unvarying formula, but science fiction readers are cursed by a slightly higher IQ and get turned off by unoriginality. Then, perhaps in reaction, the so-called New Wave washed across the genre. Oh, it was new—but it was also largely unreadable. I got part way through *Report on Probability A* and gave up in disgust. As a reader, I was caught between the jaded and the incomprehensible. Editors were catering too much to their private personal tastes, of whatever nature, instead of to those of the readership. Sales inevitably declined and

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publishers failed. Good material was still getting published, but a new reader who picked up a genre book at random was apt to be disappointed, and that's death to the prospects of a field.

It was into this weakened field that the new fantasy thrust, with its novelty and also some old-fashioned virtues. It had a strong story line and readable prose; it had a beginning, a middle, and an end. It had characters who cared. And it had a detailed, internally-consistent setting. In short, it was comprehensible and interesting and satisfying. It's amazing how many writers and editors seemed to think that sort of writing was a crime! But for those who sought good escapism without having their intelligence affronted, this was it. There was the ultimate secret of its success: a mergence of old values with new treatment. Those who condemn it should look to their own values and treatments; there is no reason why they can't do new things without sacrificing the basics—if they care to make the effort, if they care to consider their readers as well as themselves. To me, a writer's prime crime is obscurity, and his next crime is forgetting whom the hell he is writing *for*. There is no point in screaming against the popular tide, when it is so easy to flow with it. To be original within the commercial context.

But still I stand athwart a flaw in my case. I write both science fiction and fantasy, and have the elements I espouse in both. Why then does their success differ so markedly? My own example is threatening to destroy my argument!

I have a tentative answer—that again directly contradicts Platt's thesis. He praises me with faint damns, saying that my fantasy isn't as bad as the other stuff, but that none of the modern fantasy relates to real life. On the face of it he makes sense; how can dragons and magic swords and obvious puns relate to reality? Nevertheless, he is dead wrong.

The hidden strength of the

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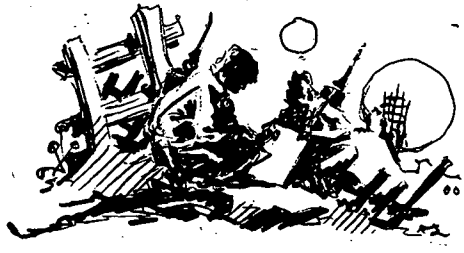
modern fantasy is that it does indeed relate to real life. It is not, as Platt suggests, written by hermits; it actually has plenty of social observation. But because the social relevance is subtle, critics with tunnel-vision overlook it. They miss the allegory. The dragons in real life are not literal, they are figurative—but they are terrible to face. We cower not before a horrendous magical spell of evil, but before the prospect of annihilation in World War Three—and what is the big difference? A wizard will not place a hex of poverty on us, but a creditor will make a negative credit reference that is every bit as damning and hard to abolish. Fantasy personifies our legitimate anxieties and makes them comprehensible, so that they can be dealt with.

The critics see only the obvious, rather than the nuances of the human condition and aspiration that distinguish the new fantasy from the old. But the readers pick it up, perhaps unconsciously; they respond to the values of integrity, courage, conscience, and commitment that they see so little of in the so-called practical world. This sort of fantasy is not really a retreat from reality; it is a closer approach to a situation in which human ideals are important, in contrast to the cynicism found elsewhere.

Science fiction can do this too. I try to do it in mine. But not as well, it seems, as I do in my fantasy. Perhaps science fiction, mine included, is too much concerned with gadgetry and not enough with human fears and dreams. ●



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(from page 28)

SOLUTION TO 1984

The digit that must be omitted is 5.

To understand why, you must know what a "digital root" is. Assume that x is any set of numbers. If you add all the digits in all the numbers, then add the digits in the sum, and keep doing this until only one digit remains, that final digit is called the digital root of the original set x.

One of the basic laws of digital roots is this. No matter how you scramble the digits of x to make a new set of numbers, the digital root of the new set will be the same as before. For example, consider the set of numbers 1, 23, and 931. The sum is 955. Adding the three digits gives 19, and $1 + 9 = 10$, and $1 + 0 = 1$, therefore the digital root of 1, 23, and 931 is 1. Now use the same digits to make a new set of numbers: 12, 13, and 39. The sum is 64. The digits add to 10, and $1 + 0 = 1$, so the digital root has not altered.

Let's apply our law to the set of ten digits. The sum is 45, and $4 + 5 = 9$, so the digital root is 9. No matter how we use these digits to make a set of numbers, the sum must have a digital root of 9. But 1984 has a digital root of 4. Therefore it is impossible to use just the ten digits to form a set of numbers that add to 1984.

Our problem asked what digit must be left out of the set of ten so that the remaining nine digits can be used to make a sum of 1984. Clearly we must omit a digit such that the remaining nine will have a digital root of 4. Only by removing 5 can we do this. The remaining nine digits will solve the problem in many different ways. Here is one:

$$\begin{array}{r} 869 \\ 702 \\ \underline{413} \\ 1984 \end{array}$$

Now for a much more difficult problem. Can you place the ten digits inside the ten circles below, a different digit in each circle, to make an improper fraction that equals 1984?

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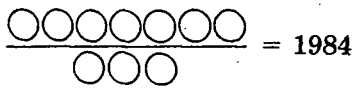

There is only one solution. Because this is a task that will appeal to computer programmers, as well as those who prefer to solve such puzzles by hand, I'll hold off the unique solution until next month.

Our final problem: Can you explain why the magic square that forces 1984 must always work? See page 134 for the answer.

CONVERT

Science fiction, don't you see
Isn't quite my cup of tea
What I really had in mind
Is a prose style more refined
Classic literature, you know
Melville, Cooper, Twain, or Poe
Or, perhaps, some foreign greats
Dickens, Tolstoy, Joyce, or Yeats
Subtle humor, dramatic sweep
To make me laugh aloud, or weep.
No, for spaceships, I'm not keen
Martians? Why, they're always green
Pseudo-scientific chatter?
Not my idea of reading matter
Still, maybe for a change of pace
I'll skip Wilde, and in his place
Take this Heinlein, Clarke, and Bloch,
All the Asimov's in stock
And any others you recommend
But not for me; they're for a friend.

—Bernard Blicksilver

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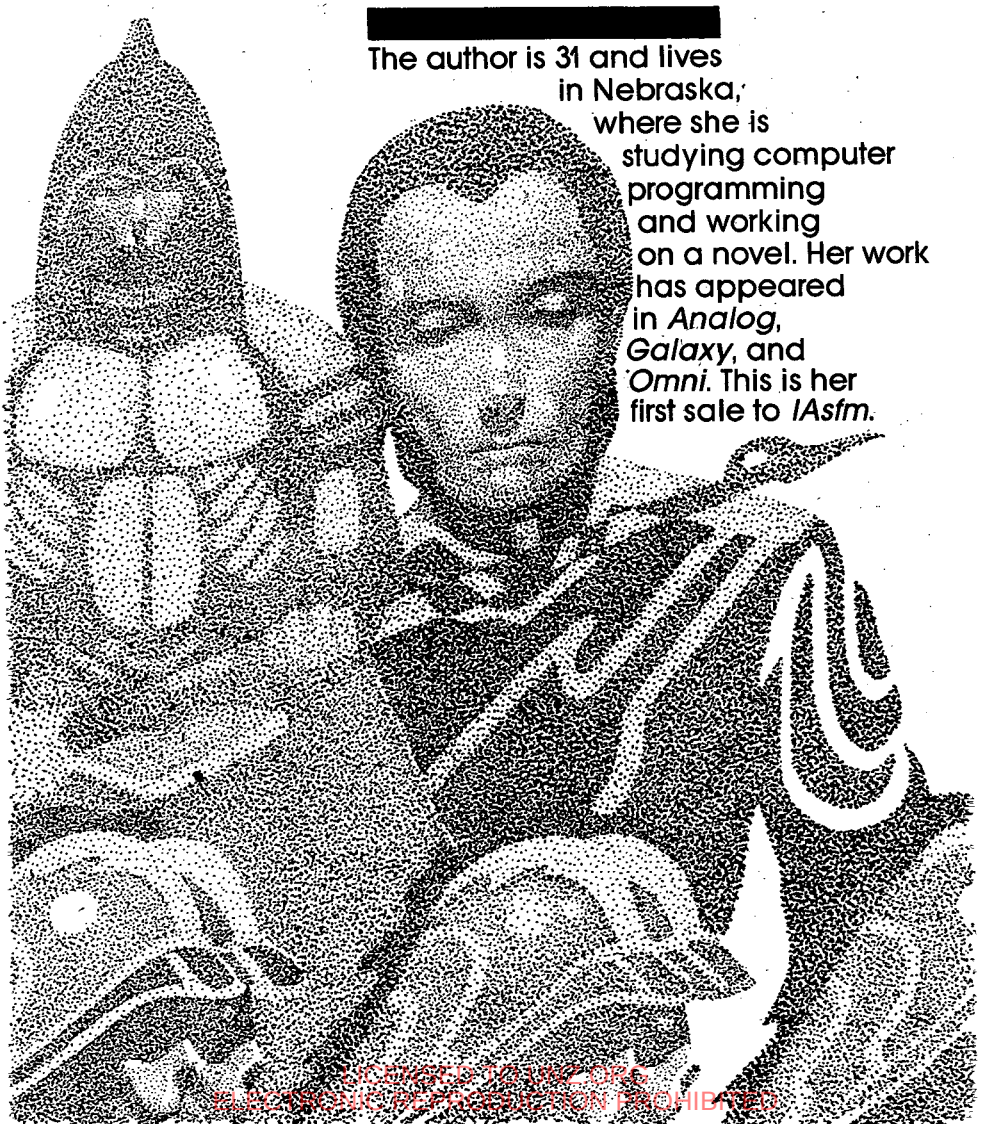
REMEMBRANCE

by Cynthia Morgan

art: Janet Aulisio



The author is 31 and lives in Nebraska, where she is studying computer programming and working on a novel. Her work has appeared in *Analog*, *Galaxy*, and *Omni*. This is her first sale to *IAsfm*.

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They could sense the city burning then, during the Remembrance of the Fall.

Clouds of incense-like smoke wafted across a garden of exotic plants that had become extinct before the first human reached this world. . . . An Ydrisian soldier, insectile in the glowing carapace of his armor, stood guard outside a door that had buckled in the heat. . . . A glass wall, as yet flawless, reflected charred rubble . . .

James Fabry walked along a quiet residential street, the embassy and his responsibilities several blocks behind him and almost forgotten. The building would be deserted now, the humans who lived and worked there having drifted away, singly or in small groups, beginning yesterday afternoon. Fabry could have left then with Alison, but he took his duties as ambassador seriously and had stayed in his office all night, attending to business that could not wait three days, until the end of this Remembrance. Now, though, he was free to enjoy the cool morning and share the Ydrisians' remembered history.

Three corpses, burnt past individual recognition, formed an unreadable ideogram where they had fallen in a court. Two were Ydrisian; the third was not . . .

He took a recorder from his pocket and dictated his impressions of the scene, so he'd be sure to retrieve it later under hypnosis. He hadn't known that any alien sapients were on Ydris at the time of the Fall.

Then he walked on, through a flickering haze of soft colors, a barely audible humming. Too many Ydrisians were within range, sharing memories at one time. Unlike the Ydrisians, humans couldn't handle simultaneous recollections. He crossed the street to a small park.

The capitol was burning.

He'd witnessed its destruction before, perhaps a dozen times in the three years he'd been on Ydris, but never from this angle, or at night. He stood in the plaza below the north entrance, where a section of the wall had collapsed. Within, flames danced attendance on massive columns, tickled vaulted ceilings, licked across delicate friezes and blackened murals. Smoke obscured most of the sky, but here and there stars shone through rifts the wind had torn in the pall. His eyes burned, tearing suddenly. Someone unseen at his left coughed. There was a shrill ringing—

—and the park, of which he'd been aware as a ghost image superimposed on the past, solidified around him, its peacefulness defiled by the jangling communicator strapped to his wrist. He jabbed at it angrily. "What is it?"

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"Robert Sember arrived on Ydris an hour ago."

"Who?" he asked, then remembered.

"The envoy you were expecting," the computer responded. "He's at the port now."

"He's not supposed to be here until next week."

"I explained that to him," said the computer, and Fabry smiled, picturing Sember confronted by the machine's implacable logic. "He asked the ship's captain to alter course and stop here first."

That wasn't so amusing. "Why is he still at the port? No, don't tell me. No one's there because of the Remembrance."

"No ships were expected."

"Call him back and tell him I'll be there as soon as possible." He turned back toward the embassy. "And have my car ready in ten minutes."

The terminal the Ydrisians had built for their human visitors was immense, its size reflecting both Ydrisian taste for monumental architecture and State's early, overly optimistic estimates of how many humans would eventually be assigned here. Intoxicated by the thought of human minds effortlessly soaking up images of the Ydrisian past, senior officials at State had planned to send thousands of people on various political, scientific, and cultural missions. It hadn't worked out. Fabry had watched State Department employees sift rapidly through the embassy, and after the first year there had never been more than fifty staff regulars. The Ydrisian language had been one stumbling block, the culture another, but ironically the experience of sharing had been what caused the most problems. State had been disappointed, but Fabry personally didn't mind the size of the embassy staff. Those who'd stayed liked it here, and many had even refused promotion if it involved a transfer.

He wondered how long the envoy would last.

Sember was in a lounge near the terminal's west entrance. He'd kept the shuttle pilot waiting. As Fabry approached, the envoy turned and spoke briefly to the pilot, who stalked away without a word. Fabry added the scene, along with the implications of that course change, to an imaginary scale where he weighed what he knew of Sember, good against bad. It was beginning to look awfully lopsided.

"Jim! Good to see you again!"

Fabry hoped his own greeting didn't sound as artificial as Sember's but it probably did. Though they'd met a number of times at State Department functions, he didn't remember the envoy, a

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small, spare man familiar only from the holograms State had sent. Lacking personal memories, he had to rely on what he'd heard of the man. Sember had a reputation for brilliant work and a difficult personality.

He helped Sember with his luggage. Driving back to the city, they traded news of mutual acquaintances at State. Fabry hoped Sember would mention in passing why he'd been assigned to Ydris, since the wide variety of the envoy's past duties had made it impossible for the ambassador to guess. Sember didn't volunteer that information, though. When they were within sight of the city's walls, Fabry asked him directly.

"Why am I here?" Sember echoed. "Historical research." He seemed amused by the idea. "They sent me out as a historian this time."

Fabry nodded, concealing his unhappiness at the answer. Of all possible roles Sember could play here, historian was the one Fabry liked least.

Initially three historians had been assigned to the embassy, but they were gone now, replaced two years ago by a cultural interpreter and an artist (who would have to be told about Sember, he thought, making a mental note to call Alison and Keith as soon as possible). The historians had been confounded by the natives of Ydris, whose concepts of time and the past were almost incomprehensible to humans. The Ydrisians carried their past with them always; it was too lively a burden to be set down and measured. The reports the historians had sent back to Earth had been embarrassingly vague, pathetic in comparison to the immediate drama of the work Alison and Keith were doing. Fabry hadn't been surprised when the historians requested transfers. He was surprised that State would send another, especially one of Sember's rank.

He was trying to think of a way to draw more information from the envoy when they drove through the gate into the city.

The trip to and from the port had been a sensory vacuum; the road was deserted, and there were no Ydrisians within range. That changed as they passed a group of children playing by the gate. Fabry barely had time to notice them, and to note the faint gray-on-blue mottling of their skin that meant they were near adolescence, before his thoughts were swept away in a flood of images and he found himself struggling to keep the car aimed properly into the ghostly geometry of the street.

He stared down a ramp leading underground. Smoke came from

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below, and echoing, muffled screams. . . . Fire climbed dry vines clinging to a wall, leaving behind a ragged lacework of ash . . .

He was aware that Sember had spoken to him, but he had to wait until they were farther into the city, and the images had given way to a pastel flickering, a faint hum, before he turned to the envoy. "What did you say?"

"I said, 'Would you like me to drive?' " Seeing the ambassador frown, he added quickly, "I'm not criticizing your driving, but you did seem . . . distracted. It might be easier to carry on a conversation if you let me drive the rest of the way."

"You think you could? It takes a while to get used to driving here. The sharing can be—how did you describe it?—distracting."

"Not for me."

"Oh?"

"I'm nonreceptive. Totally nonreceptive."

Fabry stared at him in disbelief.

"Not all of us are receptive, you know."

"Yes, I know that," Fabry said, "but why—" He hesitated. Long-practiced tact caught up with him, and the rest of the question died away. Before he could think of a way to phrase it more politely, memories swirled down over him again and he had to give all his attention to driving.

Take a fair-sized garden, complete with a sand-edged fish pond. Surround it with a wall several meters high and build outward from there for a few hundred meters, lacing the structure with glass-roofed corridors. Include an occasional open courtyard.

The Ydrisians liked monumental buildings, and when they'd constructed the embassy for their human guests, they'd taken into account the early estimates of staff size. However, they hadn't considered the limits of human receptivity. As a result, the staff lived and worked in the outer rooms, where it was possible to share, even though the suites overlooking the garden were, following Ydrisian design, the largest and most elegant.

It was one of these inner suites that Fabry had ordered prepared for the envoy. Newcomers to Ydris often found it difficult to adapt to the experience of sharing; they needed a place to retreat from the unfamiliar chaos of the Ydrisian past. But that precaution, Fabry reflected, had been unnecessary with Sember.

"Would you like a drink?" the envoy asked.

"No, thank you." He watched Sember pour one for himself. "None of us drinks any more. Alcohol interferes with receptivity."

"Yes, I'd heard that."

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"I'm surprised. I didn't think anyone on Earth had read that report. They keep sending us the usual supplies of liquor and recreational drugs."

"You've all given up drugs as well?"

"Most of them interfere, too."

Sember shook his head. "Such dedication. I wouldn't expect this sharing to mean so much to you. After all, you're receiving only part of their memories, the physical sensations. You don't receive the thoughts and feelings connected with them."

"That's true, but still . . . " He didn't want to offend Sember, but the man would have to realize, sooner or later, that he was handicapped on Ydris. He wondered again why State had sent someone who wasn't receptive. "It's essential."

"Really?" Sember's voice was icy. "I wouldn't think so. There's always the language."

Fabry looked away. The garden, with its varicolored flowers, was almost gaudy in the sunlight; the breeze-rippled pond was a dazzling, shattered mirror. He didn't want to get into an argument with the envoy.

"I have some business to attend to," he said, which was true. He had to talk to Alison and Keith, and soon. "If you'll excuse me . . . "

Alison reached his office first, about an hour after he called her. She draped herself across the couch in a carelessly erotic pose that he found annoying, since she'd ignored him completely after greeting him. Otherwise an attentive lover, Alison had no use for him or anyone else when she was working; and she was working now, dictating notes into the recorder that she always wore on a gold chain around her neck: reflections on scenes she had shared earlier, running commentary on memories as she experienced them.

Keith arrived twenty minutes later. "Well?" he demanded. "What is it? Why did you call us in?"

Fabry didn't blame him for being angry; he also resented Sember's interrupting his sharing of the Remembrance. It, and its four happier counterparts throughout the year, were the most important among the rare occasions when humans could easily link the memories they received to specific historical events.

"The envoy's here already. Sember. He arrived a few hours ago."

Alison yawned. "So?"

"He's—"

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A column of soldiers marched down a long slope . . .

The image lasted only a moment. Alison had picked up her recorder; she dropped it again with a sigh.

"He's totally nonreceptive to the Ydrisians' sharing."

Keith shrugged. "It's too bad that State sent someone who'll be handicapped here, but that's your problem, not ours."

"Not entirely. Sember's here as a historian."

There was silence, for a time. Finally Alison asked, "Why would they send him?"

"Someone on Earth must not be happy with our work," Keith suggested.

"I haven't heard anything to indicate that," Fabry said, but as a reassurance, in the face of Sember's arrival, his answer was inadequate.

Keith and Alison traded quick glances; then the artist looked away, seeming to study a bronze figurine. His fingers moved restlessly, as though anxious to be at his realizer's keyboard, creating with a computer's aid his three-dimensional representations of Ydris's past. He did fine work; both the stills and his kinetic pieces, mini-dramas in themselves, could be mistaken for holograms. Alison, too, was extraordinary in her ability to describe and interpret a scene, with or without Keith's realizations, setting even the tiniest details in the proper cultural perspective. Fabry was proud of the reports they'd been sending back; he found it hard to believe anyone at State would be dissatisfied. But then, few back on Earth had been to Ydris, and though he'd tried to explain the situation here to them, not everyone could be expected to understand.

Minutes ticked past, each saluted by an ancient clock on his desk. Once again it was Alison who broke the silence.

"What are we going to do about him?" she asked.

We'll help him, Fabry had told her. *And maybe, if we help him enough, he'll go away.*

But Sember didn't seem to want or need much help.

Fabry had only to introduce the envoy to a number of Ydrisian officials; a reception at the embassy and a few informal meetings took care of that. And while he had expected Sember to ask for help, inevitably recognizing that his inability to share the Ydrisians' memories was a handicap, that request never came. The envoy never seemed at a loss when dealing with the Ydrisians. There was, as he'd said, always the language.

Fabry hadn't believed it would suffice. The Ydrisian language

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was less a means of communication than a tool for handling the abstract. It was a highly formal and mathematically precise language, and while it delighted linguists back on Earth, it was regarded and used less enthusiastically by the embassy staff. Next to the vivid, immediate images of the past, the language was pallid, lifeless. Fabry pitied Sember for being restricted to it.

The envoy didn't seem to notice, nor did he seem bothered by the coolness with which he was treated by the embassy staff or the distance between his suite and theirs. Fortunately, he hadn't asked for other living quarters, nearer the rest of the staff. So far there had been no open arguments, but resentment seethed beneath an icy surface. Many saw the envoy's assignment here as a criticism of Keith and Alison, his continued presence as a threat.

Sember was much more popular with the Ydrisians. They liked his effortless command of their language (and Fabry smarted under the knowledge that Sember was more fluent in Ydrisian than others who had been on the planet for years), and they enjoyed trying to explain things to him through language alone. It was a game to them. Fabry thought their interest in the game would diminish as the weeks went by, but it didn't. Whenever he saw the envoy away from the embassy, Sember was the focus of a group of obviously fascinated Ydrisians. Sember looked childlike in their midst, the top of his head not even reaching their shoulders, but Fabry never saw the envoy treated with the condescending tolerance that some Ydrisians, unused to humans, had exhibited toward others at the embassy. Fabry became aware that some of his people were jealous of the envoy.

It didn't help matters that Sember was good at his work.

His first report went back to Earth nine days after he reached Ydris. The reports were daily after that, and lengthy and detailed and totally different from what the embassy had been sending for the past two years. Keith could give Earth a realization of a scene, and Alison could describe and explain it, but what Sember reported was narrative history: a certain event had occurred at a certain place; certain Ydrisians had participated; it had had these causes and these results. He gave names and places and, after Sember had been on Ydris a few weeks, dates. At first he'd limited himself to placing events in chronological order—in itself an achievement, something others at the embassy had had scant luck with—but he soon progressed to hazarding guesses as to when those events had taken place. He was always careful, though, to preface each report with a cautionary statement that the dates were "tentative."

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"Tentative!" Keith snorted. *"Arbitrary* is more like it."

"He says he has the data to back it up." Fabry spoke reluctantly, unhappy with the devil's advocate role. He was tired of discussing Sember with Keith and Alison. It was their sixth visit to his office in as many days. Ostensibly they were here to show him their latest report, but as always the conversation had gravitated toward the subject of the envoy. "I've seen some of the information he's gathered. It looks impressive."

"Did you understand how he reached his conclusions?" Alison asked.

"No, not exactly. But that doesn't mean he's wrong, or that his data are inaccurate."

"Even if the data are accurate, I'd still question his conclusions," Keith said. "He's a drunk."

"He drinks. That doesn't mean he's unreliable. There have been no complaints about him from the Ydrisians. And as far as I know, he doesn't drink when he's working on his reports."

"Do you believe him? Do you think his work is valid?"

He didn't want to answer Alison's questions. Not only would it force him to choose sides, but he couldn't answer yet. He'd given a few of Sember's reports to Teravay, an Ydrisian friend. Teravay had been intrigued by the reports but had found them too alien in concept to analyze immediately. He'd promised, though, to let Fabry know as soon as possible whether the reports meshed with Ydrisian recollections.

Alison was staring at him, waiting for his response. In desperation, he changed the subject.

"Have you heard that a bard is coming to the city?"

She blinked. She was unable to speak for a few moments, and when she did, her voice was hushed. "Are you serious?"

He nodded.

"I was beginning to think I'd never see one," Keith said. "When will he be here?"

"She. Five days from now."

"Are we allowed to attend the recital?" Alison asked.

"Yes. Unless, of course, it's some kind of biography."

"Damn. That's right." Keith frowned. "Let's hope it's not."

Fabry also hoped it wouldn't be. His staff badly needed something that would boost morale, and the bard's appearance here would serve that purpose better than anything else he could think of, except for Sember's departure.

There were only a few bards on the planet, masters of the Ydrisians' oldest art form and possibly their finest. While all

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other Ydrisians used both language and sharing to communicate, the bards worked without the spoken word, using memories alone to construct a story. Humans had been anxious to attend a recital for years, but no bards had come to the city, and they'd cancelled appearances elsewhere when humans were in the audience. Apparently the bards had had doubts about humans and their limited capacity for sharing. Now it seemed they'd changed their minds, and humans could attend a recital . . . unless it was biographical.

It had been a eulogy for an Ydrisian statesman that had first alerted the embassy to the dangers of sharing a series of memories originating with only one personality. The eulogy had been brief, no more than ten minutes, but Fabry and several others had been disoriented for days afterward. Funerals, too, were off limits to humans, since they involved an initial sharing of the deceased's memories from childhood to the moment of death. A recital, because of its reputed intensity, could be even more dangerous.

"I don't suppose there's any way to find out in advance . . . "

Fabry shook his head. "You know there isn't," he told Alison. "But I've asked Teravay to let me know whether we're in any danger. He'll be able to recognize it sooner than we can."

"Good."

Both she and Keith were smiling when they left a while later, and neither had mentioned Sember again. Telling them about the recital, Fabry decided, had been a useful stratagem. He wondered what he would do next time.

He didn't have to worry about that for several days. Keith's good mood persisted, and the day before the recital, he even allowed Sember into his studio. He'd seen Fabry walk past the door and had called to him, unaware that Sember was following the ambassador as they returned from a reception. Keith frowned when the envoy walked through the door, but instead of objecting he just shrugged and turned to Fabry.

"What do you think of it?" he asked, gesturing toward the realizer cube.

It was some kind of reptile, slightly more than a meter in length, with rough black hide and a broad, flat back.

"I've never seen one of those before."

"It's extinct."

Sember had moved closer to the cube. "Shouldn't there be a ridge down its back?"

Keith stared at him, then closed his eyes for a moment. "You're

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right." He turned back to the keyboard. The cube's interior shimmered for a few seconds as a ridge erupted from the animal's back. Keith studied the image, nodded, and looked at Sember again. "How did you know that?"

"I saw a picture of it somewhere."

"Where?"

"I don't remember."

"If you could," Fabry said quickly, sensing Keith's anger, "it would help us immensely. Representational art is extremely rare on Ydris."

"We could hypnotize—"

"No," Sember told him. "You couldn't. I don't share your obsession with memories, mine or anyone else's. But if I happen to recall where I saw it"—his gaze swung to Fabry—"I'll let you know." He left the room.

Fabry looked toward Keith. He felt he should say something, but no words came to mind, and the artist had already returned to his keyboard.

"I don't think Sember should attend the recital," Alison said.

"Hmm?" He'd thought she was asleep; he almost was. As she sat up and switched on a light, he blinked, shielding his eyes.

"Jim, couldn't you ask him—"

"To stay away? No."

"Keith doesn't think Sember should be there, either. He doesn't belong."

"He belongs there as much as any of us."

"But he can't share what we share with the Ydrisians. And I'm not sure he'd belong even if he were receptive. You've seen his reports. Number and sequence, cause and effect—there isn't room in his life for direct experience."

"If you can call images that have passed through God knows how many minds direct experience.

She stared at him. "That's the sort of thing he might say." Turning off the light, she lay down again, this time at the edge of the bed. Less than a meter separated them, but he didn't think he could bridge that distance just now.

The plaza to the west of the capitol was overflowing with Ydrisians, yet a place had been marked off for the human delegation on the capitol steps, near the dais on which the bard would stand. It was uncomfortable sitting on the steps, but they had to wait only a few minutes before silence fell upon the plaza.

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It was a silence Fabry had rarely known on Ydris when one of the planet's natives was within range. His skin crawled for a moment with the eeriness of being so near so many Ydrisians, yet he receiving nothing. So this was what Sember felt.

He turned toward the dais. An Ydrisian woman, so old her mottled skin was almost completely gray, stood there. She was dressed simply in a dark robe. He was studying her in vain for any feature that would set her apart from other Ydrisians when a remembered scene came and brushed all his efforts aside.

He stood on the edge of a platform overlooking the ocean. A dizzyingly long way below, surf foamed over broken rock . . .

It required all the strength he could summon to break free of the image, and even as he looked around for Teravay, the waves occasionally closed over the audience. Finally he caught sight of his friend. Teravay was already gazing directly at him. The Ydrisian nodded as Fabry's eyes met his: it was safe for the humans to stay.

Gratefully, Fabry began to turn back toward the dais, but he froze when he saw that Sember had risen and started away from the delegation. The envoy looked back then. His gaze locked with Fabry's for an instant. Then he smiled wryly, shrugged, and vanished into the crowd.

A moment later waves swept over everything, and Fabry let himself be pulled under.

It was evening before the envoy returned to the embassy. Fabry had seen his car pull into the drive. He waited ten minutes, then went to Sember's suite.

"Let me guess," the envoy said. "You're here to reprimand me for leaving the recital."

"No reprimand. I would like an explanation, though."

"All right. But it might take a while." He nodded toward a chair. When Fabry had sat down, Sember asked if he'd like a drink.

"Yes, thank you."

The envoy betrayed no surprise at the unusual answer to his usual question. He brought Fabry a glass of Scotch, then returned to his chair.

"Why did I leave the recital?" He pondered the question with mock gravity for perhaps a minute. "Disgust. Yes, I think it was disgust." He eyed the ambassador with amused malice.

Fabry said nothing, refusing the bait.

"Don't you want to know why I was disgusted?"

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"I suppose you'll insist on telling me."

A flicker of annoyance crossed Sember's face. "I wasn't disgusted by the recital itself or our Ydrisian hosts."

"I should hope not."

"I have a very high opinion of the Ydrisians. But our delegation . . . " He grimaced. "I couldn't stay there and look at your blank, uncomprehending faces."

"What would you know about how much we comprehend? You can't share."

"Damn it, Jim, that's not—" He shook his head, then, more quietly: "Tell me. What did you think of the recital? Was it everything you expected?"

"Of course."

"Did you understand it?"

Fabry looked away.

"I didn't think so." Uncharacteristically, there was no note of triumph in his voice.

Fabry didn't want to talk or think about the recital; he suspected the others felt the same. It had been an unusually somber group that straggled back to the embassy afterward. Even Keith, who'd been so ebullient beforehand, had merely said that it would take a long time to realize the bard's presentation. Fabry had never heard the artist speak of his work in terms of time required until today.

"We haven't had enough time to understand it yet," he said at last. "Later, when Keith's realization is complete . . . " His voice trailed off under the envoy's scornful gaze.

"A poor imitation will tell you something the original didn't?" He shook his head again. "You're hopeless. You won't ever understand the recital. You can't understand it. You aren't receiving anything that really matters. You know that. You see what an Ydrisian once saw, hear what he heard, but you don't know what he felt or thought. The Ydrisians do. You're like deaf men watching an orchestra. The musicians' actions aren't the point, the symphony is—and you don't hear it. But you're so thrilled by the ability to share part of the Ydrisian past that you've neglected the language and everything it can tell you." He paused, took a sip of his drink. "Did you know that the city has fallen and been rebuilt several times?"

Fabry shook his head.

"Four times, I think. But you've always believed that the Remembrance of the Fall concerned a single event, haven't you?

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You never even suspected that you might be sharing memories of more than one period of destruction."

The ambassador didn't respond. He thought of seeing the capitol burning at night, at sunrise, at midday.

"I wonder sometimes," the envoy said musingly, "if the Ydrisians are always fully aware of how often they've destroyed the city. Being unable to forget the past may blind them to the present. Santayana's observation was that those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it, but if you can't forget it, can't set it aside and go beyond it . . . " He sighed.

"I thought you said you have a high opinion of the Ydrisians."

"I do. But they do tend to recycle their history."

Fabry finished his drink and declined Sember's offer of another. Suddenly, he wanted to get away, though not, as was usual after a conversation with the envoy, to talk to someone else.

After the door to the suite had closed behind him, Fabry stood in the corridor for some moments, unsure what to do next. He could retreat to his own rooms and let sensations out of Ydris's past wash over him—no. Sember's talk of recycling history was too fresh in his mind. He walked down the hall, turned left instead of right, opened a rarely used door, and stepped out into the garden.

The next day Fabry had his office moved to the suite across the garden from Sember's. He explained the move by saying he had to devote more time to his work and couldn't afford the casual interruptions he'd endured before.

He began to take sedatives to filter out shared memories. The embassy's physician had been surprised when he asked for them, but he'd mentioned Sember's name and that had answered all unspoken questions. It took him a few days to discover how many pills were needed. Three at a time obliterated his receptivity but left him nearly comatose; with two, the sensations were dulled to the point where he could ignore them, and he was still capable of balancing the intricate equations of the Ydrisian language and handling all his ambassadorial responsibilities.

His relationship with Alison disintegrated, though. At first he'd found it amusing when she'd stop a conversation in mid-sentence to record a description of a memory he could barely sense, but then amusement gave way to boredom, and that to annoyance. She didn't know he was taking the sedatives. He pretended to share the memories she received and tried to act just as he had before, but she sensed his coolness and drew away, and he no

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longer felt like closing the emotional gap between them. He was almost relieved when she moved out, though he did feel jealous when he learned, two days later, that she was living with Keith.

He was too busy, however, for the jealousy to last long. He'd heard from Teravay that the Ydrisians who'd studied the envoy's reports considered them valid, and that encouraged him, even though he wasn't ready yet to ask their opinion of the information he'd gleaned from long conversations with Ydrisian friends. Nor did he talk to Sember to find out how similar the envoy's methods were to his own. Their relationship had retreated to familiar icy ground since the day of the recital, and Fabry wanted to see how well he did on his own.

He was so immersed in his experiment, so intent on fashioning a method for understanding the Ydrisians that would appease both Sember and the regular staff, that he didn't notice that the conflict was escalating to a point where compromise was impossible.

He missed the showdown between Keith and Sember, but he had several eyewitness accounts within a few hours, all alike and so plausible—predictable, even—that it seemed redundant to question the principals. They had nothing new to add, and he'd heard their excuses before.

It had begun when the envoy insisted on being allowed to see Keith's realization of the recital. Fabry wouldn't have dared make that request. Even after six weeks, the recital was still a dangerous topic around the embassy, and especially with Keith and Alison, neither of whom had yet submitted their reports on the bard. Sember had known exactly what he was starting, Fabry realized. But that didn't make him any happier with Keith's response, or the artist's decision, the day after the argument, to send a formal complaint to Earth about the envoy.

"Are you sure you want to file this?" the ambassador asked Keith when the artist brought the complaint to him for his signature.

"It's something you should have done weeks ago. He's a disruptive influence here. But since you didn't, I have to."

"Maybe you'd like to file a complaint about me while you're here, then?"

"Just sign it, will you? These damn inner rooms . . . " He looked around, shaking his head. "I hate wasting time here."

"I know." Fabry took his time reading the complaint. Finally he scrawled his signature at the bottom of the form, then shoved it across the desk to Keith, who left immediately.

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Fabry could have added a few comments of his own to the complaint, but he hadn't thought it necessary. He'd already sent Earth a factual account of the incident, and surely whoever had assigned the envoy to Ydris would defend him. State hadn't considered the wishes of anyone at the embassy when they sent the man here; he doubted they would be concerned about a single complaint.

He was wrong, as he found out a week later.

The message was waiting when he arrived at his office. Sember was being recalled to Earth; a shuttle would land at the port tomorrow afternoon. As Fabry read the printout over and over, he thought of errors made and opportunities lost.

He knew he should tell the envoy immediately, but he remained sitting at his desk. An hour had gone by, yet it was still so early that sunlight had taken only a small bite from the shadow trapped in the garden. He'd watched the lights in Sember's quarters come on, one by one. The envoy would be working on a report now, perhaps arranging interviews for later in the day, interviews that would be cancelled when Fabry gave him the news.

Lost opportunities.

Fabry hadn't realized, until now, how Sember's abilities had been wasted. Blinded by dislike of the man, the embassy staff had not considered that Sember, protected by his lack of receptivity, could safely give them at least an outsider's view of Ydrisian ceremonies they couldn't attend themselves. The Ydrisians were so accustomed to humans' declining invitations to funerals and other highly personal remembrances that Fabry doubted they'd even thought of inviting the envoy. And now it was too late.

Almost too late.

He struggled to recall something Teravay had said to him a few days before. Not thinking the remark was important, he'd paid little attention to it at the time, and now he couldn't remember the date Teravay had mentioned. It might have passed already, but he hoped not.

A call to Teravay reassured him. The Ydrisian seemed startled by Fabry's request, but he agreed to make the necessary arrangements.

Then, after turning the printout face down on his desk, Fabry went to see the envoy.

"I was wondering if you'd mind changing your schedule today."

"Depends on the change," Sember replied, not looking up from the computer display of the report he was editing.

"I'd like you to attend a funeral."

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"I thought humans weren't invited to Ydrisian funerals. Or"—he glanced up with a smile—"are we mourning one of my esteemed colleagues?"

"Nothing you'd enjoy that much, I'm afraid. The funeral is for an Ydrisian. Teravay will tell you everything you should know about it. He'll be here to pick you up in forty minutes."

"Kind of you to give me so much notice." He shut off the terminal. "Why should I go?"

"Because I can't go myself, or send anyone else."

"That's your reason. Now tell me mine."

"Attending this funeral could be the one thing that would justify your presence here. It might silence your critics."

Sember considered that for a time. "All right. I'll go."

He went over to the bar then and poured himself a drink. He tossed it off and poured another.

Fabry glanced at the clock.

"Don't fret," the envoy told him. "I'll be ready in time." Taking bottle and glass with him, he left the room.

Half an hour later he was back, walking—Fabry noted with some alarm—a bit unsteadily. At least the envoy had dressed properly, in a formal suit of ivory silk that wouldn't look too out of place among the white robes Ydrisians wore for mourning.

"We still have a few minutes left," the envoy said, turning toward the bar.

"No."

Sember gave him a quizzical smile. "No?"

"You know how Ydrisians are about time. Teravay might be here already. You mustn't keep him waiting."

Sember stared at him for a few moments, then shook his head and laughed. Fabry had never heard him laugh before. Without a word of argument, the envoy started toward the door. Fabry had to hurry to catch up with him.

It took Fabry nearly two hours to place a direct call to his superior on Earth. In Montreal it was four A.M.; Douglas, when he finally appeared on the screen, was bleary-eyed, with white stubble frosting his jaw.

"I hope this is important, Jim."

"It is. Too important to wait for a message—"

Douglas cut him off with a wave of one fleshy hand. "You don't have to explain that to me. I was just wondering how you'd justify the expense of a direct call to Accounting. Well, what is it? I don't suppose the Ydrisians have declared war on us? No? Then this must be about Sember."

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"That's right."

"I *am* sorry about the way this whole thing was handled. We shouldn't have sent him there without consulting you first."

"You shouldn't have recalled him without consulting me first, either."

Douglas nodded. "That, too. But it wasn't working out."

"*One* complaint—"

"From what Sember told us, that complaint was fairly representative."

"His work here has been invaluable."

"His methods, perhaps. The man himself is replaceable."

"Not unless you send us someone else who's nonreceptive, someone who knows the language as well . . . " His voice trailed off as he saw Douglas's expression change. "What's wrong?"

"You still believe Sember's nonreceptive?"

"Still? You mean he isn't?"

"We agreed he should pretend that he couldn't share at first. We wanted you to try a different way of dealing with the Ydrisians, and we thought you might find his methods more acceptable if you believed he had no choice. He was to have told you the truth weeks ago. He's an arrogant man, though, and he has a great deal of contempt for your methods. He may have felt that continuing the pretense helped him make his point." He shook his head. "Arrogant. Did you know he told the captain of the ship that brought him to Ydris to change course and take him there directly?"

Fabry didn't hear the question. He was gazing out the window. There was only a narrow border of shadow trimming one side of the garden now. He wondered how far advanced the funeral ceremony was.

"Jim? A direct call's much too expensive for long silences."

Fabry turned back to the screen.

"Don't look so unhappy. You'll get by without him. And it should definitely be easier to convince your people to try his methods after he's gone."

"Sure."

"Say hello to Alison for me."

"I will."

The screen went dark.

Fabry rubbed his hands over his face. He didn't know if it was possible to interrupt a funeral. He wanted to call or drive there immediately. He wanted, irrationally, to scream. He feared the

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scream would be as useful as anything else he could do now. He suspected it was too late, and it was.

His call to Earth had taken priority over all other communications, but a few seconds after the screen went blank, a light signalled that another call was waiting. He pressed a button and wasn't surprised to see Teravay's face appear.

"I'm calling from a hospital. We have Sember here."

Teravay met him at the hospital entrance. His words spoke sympathy, and his gestures and expression mimed sorrow, but it was the quick spilling of images from the Ydrisian's mind that caught and held Fabry's attention.

The ambassador hadn't thought to take any sedatives before leaving the embassy, and so he saw, more clearly than the hospital corridors they walked through, Sember as he'd appeared at the funeral. More vivid than the glimpses of the envoy, though, were memories of another life, an Ydrisian's. The Ydrisian was old, and dying.

Fabry stumbled through a sudden void, and he felt Teravay take his arm and murmur an apology. The darkness vanished, and then he was sharing a memory of Sember collapsing, sliding to the floor.

"We stopped then," Teravay said. "If we'd known earlier . . . "

"There was no way you could have known." For the first time he regretted that the sharing wasn't reciprocal. World Security would never have allowed an embassy here if the Ydrisians had been receptive to human recollections, but now Fabry saw that the situation had its disadvantages.

The envoy lay surrounded by life-support equipment, though it wasn't in use. He was in a deep coma. Fabry wondered whether Sember would still be alive if the funeral had continued to the sharing of the moment of death.

"He was to have left for Earth tomorrow."

"He could still be taken back if one of our physicians accompanies him," Teravay said.

Fabry nodded. When Sember regained consciousness, his own personality might still be submerged in Ydrisian memories; it would be best to have an Ydrisian nearby then.

As he looked down at the envoy, he felt both guilt and remorse. He doubted Sember would have attended the funeral if he'd been told he was being recalled to Earth. Fabry knew, logically, that the envoy should have admitted he was receptive weeks ago, and

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certainly before the funeral. He wasn't consoled by logic, though. He'd never known anyone who was.

He left the hospital a few minutes later. Outside, he sent his car back to the embassy. He wanted to walk; he needed time to think before he called State.

His thoughts chased around in meaningless patterns. At first he thought this was because of the newly unfamiliar intrusion of Ydrisian memories, but finally he realized that was not the problem. Neither explanations nor excuses would be appropriate. He would relate the facts to State and let them construct their own interpretation of the past.

He was thinking of summoning his car again when he saw a school nearby, and he turned toward it instead. Several Ydrisian children were on the playground. Images of giants in an outsized world assailed him. The children were very young, their capacity for sharing not fully developed. Only occasionally did he sense, among the shiny new fragments of personal experience, memories that were much older, piling driven into bedrock. For the most part, theirs was a bright, untroubled, uncomplicated world. He stopped to share it for a while. ●

SARA NEWCOMBE-ARBOR

I worked hard in that sun;
That sun that blinded me
And half the settlers of the
First terraforming party
When a shield malfunctioned.
Yet I never lost the sun:
It burned in my mind,
Burned my skin
So it was a sun
During the brief nights.

I liked the outside work.
Most remained within
The special domes
Which moved as we worked.
We stayed behind
To live in that new world
Among the first trees
And the shade
Where the sun still burns
Behind my eyes.

—by Roger L. Dutcher

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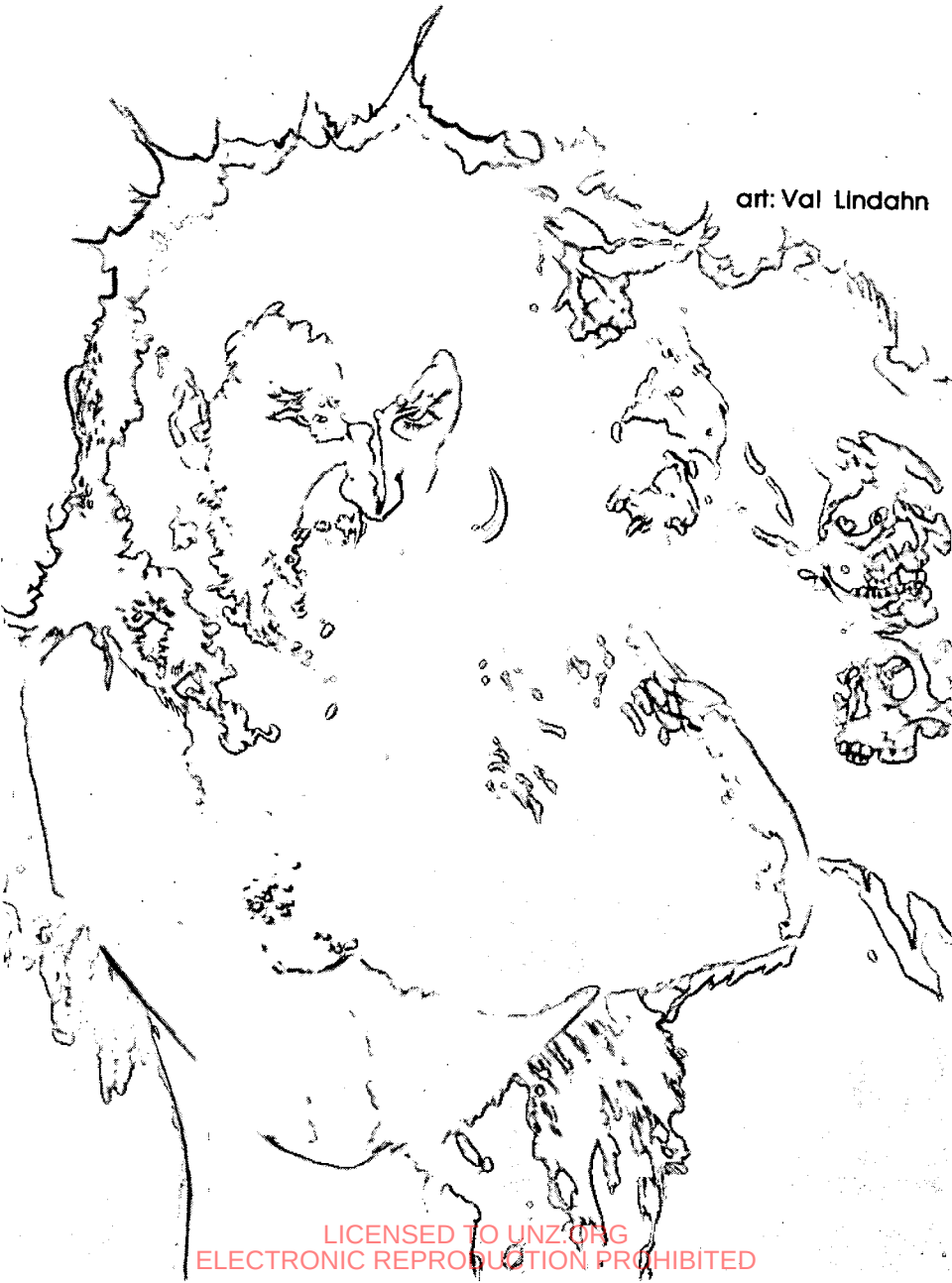

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by Ian McDowell

SON OF THE MORNING

Arthurian tales are just about a dime a dozen, these days, and while many of them attempt to adopt a new viewpoint, or introduce a new element, very few succeed. This is one of the few that does. No soaring pinnacles here—just a man and a boy discovering the consequences of faith. This is, we believe, the first sale of Ian McDowell, who says that by the time this sees print, he'll have received his MFA in Creative Writing from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. We hope to see more from him.

I sat on the cold cliff and squinted out across the water, absent-mindedly trying to drop stones on the heads of the squawking terns that nested on the tiny beach so very far below. I'd been waiting for a long time—my nose felt full of icicles and my backside was almost frozen numb. It was all a rather silly vigil: sea voyages being what they are, Arthur might not make landfall for the better part of a week. Still, I waited there, naively expecting to see the speck of his ship approaching over the dark swells. Time is nothing but an inconvenience when you're fourteen years old.

It was all so exciting. My uncle Arthur was coming to our island to do battle with a giant he'd driven out of his own realms the year before. My Da, King Lot of Orkney, had sent a rather sharp letter to his brother-in-law when Cado (that was the monster's name) turned up on our shores and started terrorizing the peasantry. Not being one to leave such things half done, Arthur responded with a promise to come to Orkney and settle Cado's hash just as soon as he was able.

Lot hadn't given much thought to Cado when his depredations were confined to the Pictish and Dalriadan Scottish peasantry, but that changed when the giant swam the eighteen miles or so of stormy water between those territories and our island and announced his presence on our shores by wiping out three entire farmsteads down on Scapa Bay. And although royal search parties

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had found the remains of over two dozen gnawed skeletons, they'd not come across a single skull. Cado evidently had the charming habit of collecting his victims' heads.

I thought about all of this as I sat on the cliff at Brough's head. I'd never been particularly worried about the monster, for he had confined himself to the less-settled end of the island—and what were a few rustic peasants more or less? And I enjoyed the embarassment that my father suffered for being unable to cope with the menace, for I harbored little love for Lot. Still, I looked forward to Arthur's coming. His battle with Cado was sure to be more exciting than a mainland boar hunt. And I did love my uncle. I loved him very much.

Suddenly I spotted it, the tiny speck that could only be a distant ship. I rubbed my salt-stung eyes, but it stayed out there; not wishful thinking but the hoped-for reality. Beyond the toy-like sail, dark clouds tumbled low across a sky as cold and gray as old, unpolished iron. The ship seemed to be riding before a storm. Evidently, they'd decided to chance the weather and make for Orkney rather than turn back to the mainland coast they'd surely been hugging during their long trip up from Cornwall.

I leapt up with a whoop and started scrambling back away from the cliff. The jagged stones, wet and black and speckled with bird dung, gave me poor footing, and several times I stumbled and fell before reaching the sand and turf. Over the rise bulked Lot's palace, squatting there in the lee that gave it some scant protection from the sea and wind. It might not have been much by mainland standards, but it was the grandest building in all the Orkneys. A twenty-foot ditch and two earthworks encircled a horseshoe-shaped two-story stone and timber hall. I dashed across the plank bridge that spanned the ditch and waved up at the soldiers manning the outer earthwork. Those that weren't busy playing dice, sleeping on the job, or relieving themselves waved back.

Mother's tower was on the opposite side of the inner courtyard from the Great Hall. Picking my way through milling clusters of chattering serfs, grunting pigs, squawking chickens, honking geese, and other livestock, I skirted the deepest mud and the piles of fresh excrement until I arrived at the tower's slab-sided foundation. The brass knocker stuck out its tongue and leered at me. "Who goes there?" it demanded in a tinny soprano.

"Mordred mac Lot, Prince of Orkney," I snapped, trying to sound smart and military. The door made no response. "Open up, dammit, I said I'm the Prince!"

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The knocker rolled its eyes nonsensically. "I heard you the first time," it trilled, "and I don't care if you're the Prince of Darkness himself, I'm not opening this door until you've wiped your filthy feet!"

It was futile to argue with something that wasn't even really alive. I scraped the heels of my boots against the doorstep while muttering a few choice curses. When I was finished, the door swung wide without further comment. But I knew that it was snickering at me behind my back.

The stairs were steep and winding, which was one reason why King Lot never came here, though they didn't bother Mother, who had the constitution of a plow horse. The room at the top was high and narrow and all of gray stone. It had one window, large and square, with an iron grille and heavy oaken shutters. A ladder connected with a trap door that opened up onto the roof. In one corner was a brick hearth with a chimney flue, not so much a fireplace as an alcove for the black iron brazier that squatted there like a three-legged toadstool. Flanking the alcove were imported cedar shelves lined with animal skulls, a few precious books, rather more scrolls, netted bunches of dried herbs, and small clay jars containing rendered animal fats and various esoteric powders. In the center of the floor was an inlaid tile mosaic depicting a circle decorated with runic and astrological symbols. Off to one side of the mosaic stood a low marble table where Mother sacrificed white doves, black goats, and the occasional slave who'd become too old, sick, or just plain lazy to be worth his keep.

Today it was a goat. Queen Morgawse was bent over the spread-eagled carcass, absorbed in the tangle of entrails that she carefully and genteelly probed with the tip of her silver-bladed sacrificial dagger. From the expression on her sharp, high-cheekboned face, I knew she'd found a particularly interesting set of omens in the cooling guts.

"Hullo, Mother."

She looked up, straightening to her full, considerable height. I may have gotten her black hair and green eyes (I'd seemingly inherited nothing of Lot's appearance, thank the gods), but that impressive stature had all gone to my older brother Gawain, though he'd added to it a broad beefiness that contrasted with her willow slimness. She was dressed in her standard magical attire: an ankle-length black gown that left her arms bare. On her head was a silver circlet, and her long, straight hair was tied back with a blood-red ribbon.

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She smiled. "What is it, sweets?"

"Arthur's here. I saw the ship."

She frowned. "Is he now? And me such an untidy mess." She wiped her bloody hands on the linen cloth she'd laid out under the goat. "Do me a favor, love. Clean up this mess while I go change to greet our guests. Do you mind?"

"No, Mother."

After giving me a quick kiss on the cheek, she hurried down the stairs, leaving me alone in the room. I bundled the goat into the stained dropcloth and stumbled with it to the window. That side of the tower was built into the earth and timber wall that formed the fourth side of the courtyard square. With a heave I got my burden through the aperture. It landed on the other side of the wall. Immediately a battle for possession of the carcass broke out between a pack of the palace dogs and several of the serfs who had hovels there.

A wet whistling sound came from somewhere above me. "Hello, Young Master. Please give me something to eat."

I looked up at Gloam where he clung to the ceiling directly over the magic circle. "No, I don't have time. Arthur's here."

Gloam resembled nothing so much as a pancake-shaped mass of dough several feet in diameter, his pale surface moist and sweaty with small patches of yeasty slime. Offset from his center was a bruise-like discoloration about the size of a head of lettuce. Only when its round mouth puckered open and its wrinkled lids parted to reveal eyes like rotting oysters did it become recognizable as a face. Gloam wasn't much to look at, but then, few people keep demons for their beauty.

"I know all about Arthur," he gurgled in a voice like bubbles in a swamp. "Your mother and he . . ." He broke off, looking suddenly uncomfortable.

"What was that?" I asked, curious despite myself.

"Oh, nothing, nothing at all. Forget I even said it."

I sighed impatiently. "Are you trying to trick me, Gloam?"

He darkened to the color of old buttermilk and faded back to his normal pasty hue, always a sign that he was enjoying himself. "No, not at all. I just know something that I'm not allowed to tell you."

"Something about Arthur, I take it."

He whistled and expelled gas. "Well, yes, and rather more than that. Have you ever wondered who your father is?"

My patience was wearing thin. "He's the King of Orkney, you stupid twit."

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"Haven't you ever considered the possibility that King Lot might not be your da?"

Hadn't I ever. I suddenly felt a strange gnawing in my guts, as if I'd swallowed something cold and hungry. Not that Lot not being my father would make for any great loss, but if he wasn't, just who was? Finding my voice again, I asked Gloam as much.

"I can't tell you that," he gurgled in reply. "Your mother doesn't want you to find out until after you've reached manhood."

"I'm fourteen, dammit," I snapped in my best regal manner.

"Well, yessss," he mused, "and there was the serving maid with whom you tried to . . ."

"Never mind that!"

"And that *is* one common definition of initiation into manhood," he continued. "Not that you managed it very well."

Enough was enough. "Listen, you stinking, slimy mollusk, if you don't tell me right this very moment what it is that you've been hinting at, I'll . . ."

"Oh, all right," he said before I could come up with an appropriate threat. "But you must find me something to eat first. A dog, perhaps. Or a cat. A child would be best, really. A tender little milk-fed babe."

"Oh, stuff it," I snapped, "I'll go catch you a chicken."

He smiled, never a pleasant sight. "A chicken would be very nice."

So I ended up chasing chickens through the deep mud of the inner courtyard for several frustrating minutes. Finally, I caught a fat rooster. Tying its legs together with a strip torn from the hem of my surtunic, I puffed and panted my way back up the stairs with the protesting cock tucked securely under one arm. It shat on me, of course, but my clothes were already so soiled that it hardly mattered.

I tossed the bird onto the tiled circle. Gloam detached himself from the ceiling with a loud sucking noise and fell on the hapless fowl, his jellyfish-like substance hiding it from view. After a brief struggle, the thing that moved under that white surface lost all recognizable shape and there was only a sort of pale sac that quivered slightly beneath its coat of frothy perspiration. The inflamed face erupted from his upper surface and grinned at me, the toothless mouth slack and drooling.

"Well, out with it, you repulsive greaseball!"

Gloam frowned. "All right, Mordred. Arthur's your father."

I didn't understand. "But he's my uncle!"

"Oh yes, that too."

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"Oh." My mind felt blank; I didn't know what to think or feel. "How?"

Gloam sighed. "Your mother will have my arse for this."

"You don't have an arse. Now, tell me how it happened."

His face flushed from dark purple to bluish green. "Fifteen years ago Arthur was little more than a green boy with his first command. No one knew who his father was: he was a landless bastard of a soldier. But he was very handsome. It happened during the Yuletide feast at Colchester, when the King and Queen of Orkney were paying their seasonal visit to Uther's court. Arthur had just had his first taste of battle and it had gone very badly. He drank too much. Your mother was tired of her dry little stick of a king, so she paid a midnight visit to Arthur's tent. It was dark and he never knew that she was the Queen of Orkney, much less that she was his own sister. When they met some years later he thought it was the first time. That's all there is to tell."

Arthur was my father. It was dizzying to go from being the son of a cold and loveless island lord to being the son of the best man in the known world. What would he say if he knew he was my da? My understanding of his Christian morality was dim at best, and, foolish as it sounds, the incest taboo never entered my mind. I'd had no formal schooling in *any* religion, and had no idea what the followers of the crucified carpenter thought about such things.

Arthur had hardly ever spoken of his faith. That was understandable: he'd come to power in a realm that was at least half what he'd call pagan, and no doubt he'd had to learn tact. Certainly, he'd never held being a nonbeliever against my brother, nor had he tried to repress the worship of Mithras, the Roman soldier's god, among his mounted troops.

But tolerance of different religions hardly meant that he'd welcome an illegitimate (and incestuous, but I still wasn't thinking of that) son with proverbial and literal open arms. Still, there was the chance he might. I suddenly found myself wanting that very much. He was unmarried, and according to gossip had not left behind the usual string of bastards that would be expected of a thirty-two-year-old bachelor king and former soldier. Though it was said that he'd shown more than a passing interest in Guenevere, the reputedly stunning daughter of the Cornish lord Cador Constantius.

The sound of sudden commotion outside broke my reverie. "That would be Arthur's arrival," commented Gloam dryly, as he flopped over to the wall and began to climb it, leaving a sluglike trail across the tiles and flagstones.

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I was out of the room and down the steps in a trice, for at least action would keep me from having to think. Indeed, the yard was a confusion of babbling serfs, barking dogs, and clucking chickens, all frantically trying to stay clear of the muddy wake churned up by the two-dozen riders that came pounding under the fortified gatehouse. A trim man on a magnificent black gelding rode at their head, snapping off orders with the practiced ease of long command.

Arthur was dressed for rough travel in an iron-studded leather jerkin and knee-high doeskin boots. His head was protected by an iron-banded cap of padded leather, lighter than the conical helmet he'd wear on campaign, and a sopping cloak was draped around his shoulders and saddle like limp wings. Obviously, his ship had passed through the storm I'd seen brewing.

He was of medium height, with broad shoulders and a barrel chest. His brown hair was cut short and his face clean-shaven in the Roman manner. Although this tended to emphasize his rather large ears, he was still a handsome man. For the first time I realized that his slightly beaky nose was almost identical to my own.

He vaulted down from his tall horse and clapped me on the shoulder. With his crooked grin and easy manner, he was still more the soldier than the king.

"Hullo, laddy-buck, you've become quite the man since I saw you last." I started to bow, which was rather hard with him standing so close. "No need for that," he laughed, "we're all bloody royal here."

"Actually, they're always saying Gawain got all the height and I'm the puny one," I replied to his compliment.

"Are they now? Well, a lad's growth is measured in more than the distance from his head to his heels, and that's the truth of it."

I saw no sign of Gawain. "Did you bring my brother with you, sir?"

He shook his head. "His squadron's manning the Wall, keeping an eye on our Picti friends."

Lot's acid bark cut through the brouhaha. "Mordred, get the hell out of the way, you're as filthy as a Pict! Change before supper or eat in the stable: by Mannanan and Lir, I'll have no mud splattered brats in my hall."

I quickly stepped back out of reach as the thin, stooped form of my nominal father came gingerly through the clinging mud. Arthur's formal smile was as cold as the sea wind. "Give you good day, my Lord of Orkney." To me he whispered, "Run along now

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before your Da starts to foam at the mouth. We can talk later, when we're out of this forsaken gale."

"Gale, hell, this is a slight breeze for this place," grumbled one of his captains who'd overheard the last sentence.

I scurried through the crowd to the entrance of the Great Hall. Brushing past clucking servants, I entered the building, shut the stout oak doors behind me, and crossed the huge room to the stairwell, where I started bounding up the steps two and three at a time. As I ran down the hall to my room, I began stripping off my filthy clothes. Once in my chamber, I tossed the soiled garments out the narrow window, shouting down instructions to the slave whose head they landed on to have them patched and laundered and to send someone up with a bucket of hot water. After washing with more than my usual care, I donned a fresh linen shirt, cross-gartered wool breeches, a long-sleeved and high-necked undertunic, a short-sleeved and v-necked surtunic, and calfskin shoes. That done, I went downstairs to the feast.

Lot sat at the head of the table with his back to the roaring hearth, Mother at his right and Arthur at his left. The King of Orkney had dressed for the occasion in a purple robe trimmed with ermine fur and there was fresh black dye in his thinning hair. The beard that he wore to conceal his lack of a chin was more clipped and clean than usual, but the barbering only emphasized its sparse inadequacy.

By contrast, Arthur's garments were of plain wool and bare of any fashionable embroidery at the neck, sleeves, or hem of his surtunic. His brown breeches were cross-gartered with undyed strips of dull leather and he'd changed to a clean but far from new cloak that was fastened at the shoulder with a simple bronze brooch. Although he'd been on his throne for almost three years, he'd never learned to dress like a king.

Mother had saved a place for me on her left. Lot glared but said nothing as I sat down and Arthur winked. The first courses were just being served: salads of watercress and chickweed, heaping piles of raw garlic, leeks, and onions, hardboiled auk and puffin eggs, and smoked goat cheese. Usually Lot tended to serve guesting lords niggardly meals of boiled haddock, salt herring, and the occasional bit of mutton stewed in jellied hamhocks, leading Mother to the frequent observation that we might be better off as Christians, for they observed their Lent only *once* a year. But he dared not be stingy with his royal brother-in-law, High King of all the Britons. This time there'd be real meat to come, and plenty of it.

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Arthur's men and the household warriors sat on sturdy, rough-hewn benches, quaffing tankards of ale and wine while the palace dogs and a few favored pigs milled about, waiting patiently for the scraps they knew were soon to come. The wall tapestries had recently been cleaned, fresh rushes were strewn on the floor, and the long wooden table was spread with that ultimate luxury, a snow-white linen tablecloth. More courses began to arrive: dogfish and grayfish in pies, whale flesh simmered in wine, smoked plovers and shearwaters, and a whole roasted ox and boar. Individual servings were shoveled out onto trenchers of hard, crusty bread and each man was given several small clamshells to use as table implements, though most preferred to stick with their knives and fingers. Most of the guests did respect the tablecloth and instead wiped their hands on their clothing or on the backs of passing dogs.

Lot was actually trying to keep up a polite facade. "Of course, good Artorius," he was saying (he always called Arthur by his formal Latin name), "I'll be more than happy to help fortify the northern coast of the mainland—assuming, of course, that you can force a treaty on the Picts."

Arthur nodded. "The Picti are half-naked savages, but they're natives just the same as us and we could use their help against the Saxons."

"Ach, I thought you'd finished them for once and all at Badon Hill, back before you'd even ascended to the throne."

Arthur shook his head. "Not by half, I didn't. Oh, it will take them a few years to mount a new invasion, but they'll be back. They can't get it out of their thick heads that this isn't their land; do you know what they're calling us now? *Welshmen,* their word for foreigners. Foreigners, in our own forsaken country! Well, either Briton and Picti will find a way to stand together, or they'll go down separately under the Saxon yoke!"

Lot sipped his wine. "Of course, as an outsider, I can see certain virtues in them that your folk can't. For instance, their kings are very brave."

Arthur looked at Lot sharply. He knew as well as I did that the King of Orkney wasn't one to be praising others unless he had an ulterior motive. "Lord of Orkney," he said softly, "I came here to rid your land of a dire menace, not to hear you sing the virtues of my enemies."

"Well spoken," replied Lot easily, "but I was simply remarking on a fact. Take old Beowulf Grendelsbane, for instance. He took on the monster that was menacing his people alone, and with

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bare hands, besides. Grabbed the beastie by the arm and pulled it off as I easily as I tear the wing off this bird's carcass."

"I am familiar with the story," said Arthur dryly. "What's the point?"

Lot smiled. "Just this. Though you've never said as much, I do believe that it would please you to see these islands convert to Christianity."

Arthur nodded warily. "It would do my heart good to see my nephews and sister living in a Godly household." Mother cleared her throat and made a point of looking down at her hands.

"But you must understand," continued Lot, "my people find it hard to be impressed with your faith when you must bring with you over a score of armored men to do the sort of job that Beowulf of the Geats was able to do with his good right arm."

One of Arthur's men spoke up. "Sire, this is boastful nonsense! That Saxon oaf could never have . . ."

Arthur silenced him with a gesture. He turned back to Lot. "Lot Mac Connaire, if I go against Cado tomorrow all alone, taking none of my men with me, and if I bring you back his head, do I have your word that you will accept Holy Baptism?"

Lot nodded. "If you can manage that, I'll build a church on every island."

I felt stunned. Such a deed would be appropriate to a classical hero, but it could hardly be expected of a flesh-and-blood man. I looked carefully at my father. He was clearly not a fool. "Uncle Arthur," I said softly, "you are the greatest warrior in all of Britain. But is this wise?"

He looked at me solemnly. "You're a good lad, Mordred. Some day you'll be an excellent king. I would see you brought into the Faith."

I felt uncomfortable under his gaze. "I was thinking of your realm, sir. Your people need you. Such a risk puts them in danger, too."

He grinned his lopsided grin. "Well, they'll just have to cross their fingers and hold their breath, won't they? Don't be a worrywart, lad, I do know what I'm doing. My God defended Padriac against the serpents of Ireland, and Columba against the dragon of Loch Ness. He protected Daniel in the lion cage and lent needed strength to little Daffyd's good right arm. He will not fail me, not if I'm half the man I must needs be if I'm to call myself a king."

Mother cleared her throat. "Tell me, brother, has that kingship become a bore yet, or do you still like the office?"

Arthur laughed. "It's been far from dull. Before I learned of my

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paternity, I thought I'd be a simple soldier all my life and that all my difficulties would end once I beat the Saxons. Then came Badon Hill, where I did that very thing, and I dreamed that I might retire in peace and quiet." Several of his men snorted at that, but he ignored them. "Don't laugh; I even had visions of becoming some sort of gentleman farmer, as larky as that sounds. But then Uther opened his deathbed Pandora's box and there were suddenly at least ten thousand voices crying 'Artorius Imperator! We want Arthur for our king!' and who was I to say them nay? My first year on the throne was all fighting. The Picts had to be driven back across the Wall, the Irish were making pirate raids, and every local king with a cohort to his name thought it worth his while to challenge my right to rule. Such a bloody mess you never saw and I imagined I'd be old and dying like Uther before I had it straightened out."

He motioned for a slave to refill his goblet. "But that was just the easy part. The fighting's been over for two years this winter and since then I've spent half my days haggling like a fishmonger and the other half wearing as many masks as a dozen troupes of actors. But I can't complain. It's been fun for all of that."

Mother laughed sweetly. "I'm sure it has." She smiled icily at her husband. "Isn't it refreshing to listen to a ruler who takes his duties seriously and doesn't look upon his office as his gods-granted excuse for never having to sully himself with a day's honest work?" Lot's only reply was a belch. His flushed and sweaty face indicated that he was getting very drunk.

Mother turned back to Arthur. "You must have future plans."

He nodded. "Trite as it sounds, peace and prosperity are the first things that come to mind."

"That's a rather vague agenda."

The King of Britain smiled. "Isn't it just? I'm afraid that my ideas of good government are not particularly complex. I'll die happy if I can just maintain a nation ruled by the principles of Roman law and Christian virtue."

Lot hiccuped explosively. "I thought it was Roman Law that nailed your Christian virtue to a bloody tree."

The room went very quiet. More than ever, I was glad that Lot was not my father, but I felt ashamed of him just the same. Arthur's face seemed to freeze over like a winter loch, but he kept his voice calm. "I'll ignore that remark, Lord of Orkney. Some men are always fools and others need a touch of strong drink to bring it out."

Once again, Mother saved the situation. She clapped her hands

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for Fergus, the court bard. The little Leinsterman strutted out, bowed, and began to pluck his gilded harp. Lot and Arthur's eyes gradually unlocked while they listened to those soothing melodies. Skillful harpsong can calm a Brit that way, and even when drunk Lot was too much the coward to meet Arthur's gaze for long. Arthur's men relaxed and took their hands away from their swordbelts, causing our household guardsmen to breathe sighs of deep relief. Though the numbers were on their side, they knew full well that Arthur's crack troops could carve them up like so many feast-day bullocks. I understand that the Saxons consider it in bad taste to wear steel at the table, and in this regard I've come to suspect that they may be a bit more civilized than we are.

Soon it was time for all to say goodnight. Arthur's men trooped out to the barracks (in deep winter weather they'd have stretched out before the hearth, sharing the floor with the dogs and pigs and the household guard), while Arthur himself had been granted an apartment at the far end of the upper hall. I paid my respects, trudged up the stairs, and settled wearily into bed without bothering to remove my clothing.

I had the oddest dream. I was standing below the crest of a steep hill, where a tall wooden cross loomed against an inky sky. A corpse had been crucified there in the old Roman fashion. After awhile I somehow realized that it was the *Cristos*. Although the birds had had his eyes and lips, I still recognized his face as being Arthur's.

I awoke all drenched with sweat, and found it hard to relax and sleep again.

Despite my lack of rest I managed to rise before dawn and dress in new and heavier woolen clothing, to which I added otter-skin boots with the fur inside, a hooded cloak, and a leathern jerkin with protective bronze scales. Then I strapped on a shortsword and slung a bow and quiver over my shoulder. These might not be much protection against Cado, but only fools take extra chances when such monsters are about. I knew my way well enough to navigate the upper floor and the pitch-black stairwell, but right after reaching the lower landing I tripped over a sleeping boarhound, who put his considerable weight on my chest and began to wash my face with his enormous tongue. After I'd cuffed him in the nose several times, he finally realized that I didn't want to play and released me. There was nothing left of the fire but embers, but those gave me enough light to tiptoe through the sleeping forms until I reached the outer door.

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The yard was empty, for all the livestock and the serfs were huddled in the barns, and the mud was frozen solid by the evening chill. The dawn was close at hand, and enough light leaked over the horizon to see by. Squaring off in front of one of the wooden pratice posts that stood between the barracks and the stables, I drew my sword and began to hack away. Despite the cold and the usual fierce wind, I'd actually started to work up a sweat when the door to the great hall opened and Arthur emerged.

Like me, he'd dressed for travel in a fur-lined cloak and high boots. Instead of the iron-studded leather he'd worn the day before, he was now clad in a mail hauberk: a thigh-length coat of inch-wide steel rings, wherein each metal circlet was tightly interlocked with four others. This was the sophisticated modern gear that, along with the recent introduction of the stirrup, had made his mounted troops the terror of the Saxon infantry. On his head sat a conical helmet with lacquered leather cheekguards and a metal flange that projected down over his nose. The sword at his side was at least half again as long as the traditional German *spatha*, and it had a sharpened point like that of a spear, as well as an efficient double edge. He also carried a sturdy iron-headed cavalry spear and a circular white shield embossed with a writhing red dragon was slung across his back.

He seemed surprised to see me. "Practicing this early?"

"Every day," I gasped between strokes. "Gawain won't be the only warrior in the family."

He leaned on his spear and watched me with a critical eye. "Use the point, not the edge: a good thrust is worth a dozen cuts. That's it, boyo, but remember; a swordsman should move like a dancer, not like a clod-hopping farmer."

Exhausted, I sat down on the cold ground. The post was splintered and notched and my sword was considerably blunted. No matter, it was just a cheap practice weapon.

"I rather foolishly forgot to ask your father for directions to Cado's lair," Arthur was saying.

"I know," I panted. "I'll take you there. Folk say he's made himself a den out of the old burial cairn of Maes Howe, down on the shore of the Loch of Harray."

He shook his head. "It would be too dangerous for you to come along."

I'd known he'd say that. "You need a guide. I know the way, because I used to play down there when I was just a kid." Time for the baited hook. "Don't you want me to witness the power of your God?"

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He looked very grave. "Would the deed convince you of the correctness of my Faith?"

No, my faith was in him and not his *Cristos,* but I could hardly say *that.* "It would be something to watch," I said truthfully, "and I'd like very much to see a miracle."

His frown finally worked itself into a grin, as I'd known it would. Even then I must have partially realized just how vain he was of his faith, for all that he tried not to show it. "Saddle up," he said, pointing towards the stable. I readied his horse and mine while he went back into the great hall to steal bread and smoked cheese from the kitchen. The sun was only beginning to peek over the horizon when we rode across the plank bridge and skirted the nearby village's earth-and-timber palisade.

We passed fallow fields strewn with dung and seaweed, thatch-roofed stone cottages where the crofters were just rising for their daily toil, and low hills bedecked with grazing sheep. The Royal Cattle ruminated unconcernedly in pastures surrounded by nothing but low dikes of turf and stone. On the mainland the local kings and lordlings considered cattle raids to be good sport and engaged in livestock robbery with the same gleeful abandon that they brought to deer or boar hunts, but our island status protected us from that sort of nuisance.

Keeping in sight of the ocean, we rode between wind-shaped dunes and rolling slopes carpeted with peat and stubby grass. The sun rose slowly into view and shone golden on the water.

There was a whale hunt in progress beyond the tip of Marwick Head. Men in boats chased the herd towards a sand bar while beating pitchers, rattling their oarlocks, and shouting in an attempt to terrify the creatures into beaching themselves. The women and children who waited in the shallows would then attack with harpoons and makeshift weapons that ranged from peatforks to roasting spits. As they died the whales made shrill, whistling cries and strange humming noises that sounded like distant pipes and drums. Ordinarily I would have stopped and made sure the royal share was put aside for the castle household, for whale flesh was always a welcome treat. However, today there wasn't time.

It was over six miles down the coast to the Bay of Skail. We soon passed all signs of human settlement. The tireless wind actually seemed to get fiercer as the morning warmed. My feet itched from the otter fur inside my boots and not being able to scratch made for a decided nuisance. For once, I could smell no sign of rain. The great clouds that raced overhead were as white as virgin snow.

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"Arthur," I said, breaking a long silence, "were you glad to find out that Uther was your father?"

He took no offense at what might have been an impertinent question. "Yes, though the old sinner wasn't the sort I might have chosen for my da. Still, I'd been conceived in wedlock, and knowing that took many years' load off my mind."

"Why? Is that important to a Christian?"

"Very. Bastardy is a stain that does not wash off easily. Being born that way just makes the struggle harder."

This was getting rather deep. "What struggle?"

"To keep some part of yourself pure. A man has to look beyond the muck he's born in."

For some reason I wanted to keep making conversation. "Is it hard, then?"

He was looking out at the waves but his gaze was focused on something else entirely.

"Always. I remember my first battle. A fog had rolled in from the coast and hid the fighting. Men would come stumbling out of the mist waving bloody stumps or with their guts about their feet."

I'd never heard war described that way. "But you won, didn't you?"

He nodded. "The first of many 'glorious victories.' I was as green as a March apple and could no more control my men than I can command the sea. They burned three Saxon steadings with the men still in them, British slaves and all. The women they crucified upside down against a row of oak trees, after they'd raped them half to death."

I didn't want to hear this, but he kept on. "There was a celebration at Colchester in honor of our triumph. Your parents were there, I think, though my rank was too low for me to sit at the royal table and so I didn't meet them. I messed with the junior officers, got more drunk than I've ever been since, and committed all the standard soldier's sins. When I sobered up and decided I would live, I made a vow to never again become what I was that day."

Later, we dismounted and devoured the bread and cheese while taking shelter in one of the stone huts of Skara Brae, the ancient remains of a Pictish village that stood half-buried in the sand beside the Bay of Skail. The meal done, Arthur stood beside his gelding and gazed inland, scanning the treeless horizon. Gesturing out at that rolling emptiness, he said, "For all its smallness, there's none that could accuse this island of being the most

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crowded kingdom in the world. Not to worry; some day you'll be lord of more than this."

"What do you mean?"

"The time will come when you take your father's place upon the throne of Orkney."

"I don't know," I said doubtfully. "It's bound to go to Gawain, not me. After all, he's the oldest."

Arthur clapped me on the shoulder. "Not if I have anything to say about it. Your brother's a good man and I love him dearly, but he doesn't have the makings of a king. Too thick-headed. The Saxons will return someday, and when they do I may be too old or too tied down by royal duties to lead the war host into battle. I'll need a good *Dux Bellorum*, and the role of warlord fits your brother like a glove. Lot will proclaim you his heir if he knows what's good for him, and that's the truth of it."

I gave up on all attempts at idle chatter as we rode inland for the Loch of Harray. Arthur remained outwardly calm, but I was beginning to feel the first gnawings of anticipation in my churning stomach. Ach, but I was so sure that I was about to see a deed the like of which had not been witnessed since the days of Hercules himself.

At last we spied Maes Howe. It was a huge green mound over a hundred feet in diameter and as high as a two-story dwelling. Here and there the great gray stones of the cairn's roof poked their way above their covering of grass and soil. I knew from my boyhood explorations that there was an exposed passage on the other side of the barrow that led to a central chamber about fifteen or twenty feet square. If Cado was as large as he was reputed to be, he obviously did not object to cramped living quarters. Of course, giants were probably used to things being too small for them.

Arthur reined in his horse at the edge of the broad but shallow ditch that surrounded the mound. "I assume that this is it, then."

"Aye. The only entrance that I know of is on the other side."

His eyes scanned the great mass of earth and rock. "I think you'd best keep back a ways, so that that if I should fail you'll have time to wheel your horse around and escape."

And in that moment Cado walked around from behind the ancient pile.

Arthur and I gasped in unison and I actually came close to shitting in my breeches. The giant was at least eight feet tall and tremendously broad, with ox-like shoulders and a barrel torso. In fact, he was so stumpy that if seen at a distance he might be

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mistaken for a dwarf. His filthy, mud-colored hair blended with his equally filthy beard and fell to his knees in matted waves. Woven into this tangled mass were the scalps and facial hair of his victims' severed heads, so that he wore over a dozen mummified skulls in a sort of ghastly robe. This served as his only clothing. From the mass of snarled locks and grinning eyeless faces protruded arms and legs as massive as tree trunks, all brown and leathery and pockmarked with scrapes and scratches that had festered into scabby craters. Even at thirty paces his stench was awful, a uniquely nauseating combination of the smells of the sick room, the privy, and the open grave. His appearance alone was so formidable that the weapon he held easily in one gnarled hand, a twenty-foot spear with an arm-length bronze head, seemed virtually superfluous.

Ignoring me, his gaze met Arthur's. "Ho, Centurion," he boomed in surprisingly pure Latin. "How goes the Empire?"

This was the real thing, with no safe gloss of legendary unreality. I found myself wanting to be hunting or fishing or snatching birds' eggs from the cliffs, or doing anything as long as I was far away from here. It was a shameful feeling, and I did my best to ignore it. Arthur at least seemed to be keeping his cool.

"No more Empire, Cado, not for years. And I'm no centurion. You must know that."

Cado squinted at him with red-rimmed eyes the size of goose eggs. "Aye, the Empire's dead. And so are you, *Artorius Imperator.*"

Arthur wasn't taken aback. "You know me, then. Good."

Cado snorted. "Oh, I know you well enough, Artorius. How could I not know the man whose soldiers have harried me across the length of Britain. You're mad to come here without them, *Imperator.* Do you wish your son to see you die?"

I was suddenly unable to breathe. How could Cado know? How could he *know?* By the very look in his eyes, I was suddenly sure that he did.

Arthur stiffened. "He is not my son. And I do not intend to die."

Cado's black-lipped mouth spread out in a face-splitting grin, exposing a double row of square yellow teeth that might have done justice to a plow horse. "I think he is, Artorius. I can smell you in his sweat and see you in his face. Like all immortal folk, my kind can sense things that humans cannot. He's your seed, or I'm the Holy Virgin."

Arthur looked at me. Afraid to meet his eyes, I tried to turn

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away, but I felt frozen by his expressionless gaze. Before I could speak, he turned back to Cado and laughed out loud.

"You can't confuse me with such paltry tricks, monster. And don't make it any harder on yourself with blasphemy. I don't profess to know whether or not you have a soul, but if you do you'd better make your peace with God."

Cado never stopped smiling. "Don't you know where giants come from? We're descended from the ancient *nephilim,* the sons of the unions between the *Elohim* and the daughters of Adam. I need no peace with God—my blood is part divine!"

Arthur lowered his lance and unslung his shield. "More blasphemy, Cado? You might face your ending with somewhat better grace."

Cado growled, a low rumbling that spooked my horse and made him difficult to control. "Tell me one thing," said the giant. "Why have you hounded me these many leagues? What am I to you now that I am no longer hunting in your lands?"

"You know full well what you are," said Arthur grimly. "Your actions have made you an abomination in the eyes of the Lord."

Cado began to laugh, an ear-splitting sound like a dozen asses braying all at once. "Little man, your puking Lord fathered all abomination. I see his world as it truly is and act accordingly."

Couching his lance, Arthur spurred his horse forward with what might have been a prayer and might have been a muttered curse. The sun gleamed on his polished mail as he emerged from the shadow of a wind-driven sweep of cloud. Lugh and Dagda, but he looked magnificent in that brief moment.

Cado casually lifted his spear and thrust out with the blunt haft, catching Arthur squarely in the midriff before he was close enough to use his lance. Torn from the saddle, he seemed to sit suspended in the air for a brief eternity. As he crashed to the sward, his horse shied past Cado and went galloping away in the direction of the distant loch.

Cado bent over him, reversing his spear so that his spear head just touched Arthur's throat. For a measureless time they seemed locked in that silent tableau. My brain screamed that I should do something, but my body showed no interest in responding. The two combatants were frozen and so was I, and I lost all sense of myself as my awareness shrank to nothing but those still and silent figures.

At last Cado spoke. "Now would be the time to look me in the eye and say 'kill me and be done'—I do believe that that's the standard challenge. But you can't say it, can you?" He laughed

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even more loudly than before. "They all tell themselves it's victory or death, but in the end they find those two limited alternatives not half so attractive as they'd thought."

Arthur hadn't moved. I was suddenly abnormally aware of my physical sensations: the itchy fur inside my boots, the sting of the cold air upon my raw nose, the spreading warmth at my crotch where I'd pissed my breeches, and the mad pounding of my heart. Arthur was down. He wasn't moving. I knew that I must do something, and it seemed incredibly unfair for such responsibility to have fallen upon my puny shoulders.

I've always been good with horses. Urging my mare forward with my knees, I unslung my bow and drew an arrow from my quiver. The trick was not to think about it, but to act smoothly and mechanically. If I thought about it, I'd fumble. Cado was within range now. He looked up just as I pulled the string back to my ear and let the arrow fly. The feathered shaft seemed to sprout from his left eye socket. I'd already drawn again, but all my instinctive skill left me and the arrow went wild. Not that it mattered. My impossibly lucky first shot had done the job.

Cado stiffened and groaned. He shivered all over, causing the heads in his hair and beard to clack together like dry and hollow gourds. When he fell over backwards it was like a tower going down.

As suddenly clumsy as a six-year-old, I half-fell out of my saddle and ran to Arthur. "Don't be dead," I pleaded like a stupid twit, "please Da, don't be dead."

He groaned. "Too big. Sometimes evil's just too damned big. And I'm too old for this."

"Are you all right?"

He sat up painfully. "Rib's broken, I think, but I can still stand." With my help he did. "My horse has run off."

I pointed to mine. "Take the mare. I'll search for your gelding."

He clapped me on the shoulder. "You're a good lad. I was an arrogant fool today—I hope you can forgive me."

I didn't know what he meant. "Of course," I muttered, cupping my hands and helping him into the saddle. From this vantage point, he surveyed Cado's corpse.

"Like Daffyd and Goliath. The Lord works his will: I'm taught humility and Cado is destroyed."

I looked him in the eye. "Are you saying that your god guided my arrow?"

He shrugged. "Perhaps. Not that it takes any of the credit away

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from you. I'm very proud, Mordred. I pray that someday the Lord will give me as fine a son as the one he gave to Lot."

I'd been trying to find an opening all day. My heart was in my mouth—this was more frightening than confronting Cado. "Arthur, there is something you must know."

Something in my voice must have warned him, for he looked at me very oddly. "And what would that be?"

No hope for a smooth tongue: I had to be blunt and open. "You're my father."

"What?"

"You're my father."

I knew it then: I'd blundered. His face wore no expression, but the words hung between us in the heavy air. I tried to laugh, but it was a forced, hollow sound. "I was just joking," I stammered, desperately trying to unsay my revelation. "I didn't mean . . ."

He reached out and gripped my shoulder. His clutch was firm, painful. And his eyes were cold and hard as Lot's. "You're lying now. I know that much. And Cado called you my son, too. How could it be true?"

I tried to pull away, but he held me fast. Now my terror was of *him*, of the man himself. This was a side of Arthur that I'd never seen. "Please," I said, "it's all a mistake. I . . ."

He shook me. "What makes you think you are my son? Tell me now, the truth, and all of it."

I could no more refuse that command than I could up and fly away, though I would have been glad to do either. "Mother's familiar told me."

"A demon? And you believed such a creature?"

"I asked Mother, and she said that it was true."

He shook his head. "How? It's impossible. We've never . . ." He broke off then, but his eyes were still commanding.

"It was at Uther's court after your first battle. She came to your tent in disguise."

The silence that followed that statement was as cold and painful as the bitter wind. He mumbled something that might have been a prayer, and his expression resembled that of a man kicked by a horse. His hand slipped from my shoulder. "It's sin," he said at length, his eyes not meeting mine. "It's mortal sin."

This was worse than I'd feared. Bloody gods, but why couldn't I have kept my foolish mouth shut? "She didn't know you were her brother. It's not her fault."

"No, for she's a pagan, and lost anyway. I'm the one to blame."

"It wasn't your fault either. It wasn't anybody's fault."

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He shook his head sadly. "Ach, no, it's always someone's fault. Always." Straightening up, he reined the mare towards Cado's still form. "You knew, monster. You knew what I was. Perhaps you should have killed me." His shoulders slumped, and he looked so *old* as he sat there swaying in the saddle. "But no, then I'd have died in ignorance, unshriven, with no chance at repentance. No wonder that I lost today. My own sin rode beside me."

"Don't talk like that!" I shouted, suddenly angry as well as hurt.

He ignored my protest. "Come up behind me. I won't leave you here, no matter what you are."

No matter what you are. Words that have haunted half my life.

"Go on with you," I snapped. "I said I'd find your goddamned horse."

He didn't react visibly to my profanity. He just sat there, slumped in the saddle, the wind tugging at his cloak. His eyes were focused in my direction, but it was as if he was looking through me at something else. At length he spoke. "All right, Mordred, suit yourself." With that he spurred the mare into a gallop. I suppose that in that moment I became the only thing he ever fled from, but that distinction does not make me proud. I stood there, watching him ride away, while the wind whispered in the grass.

"Throw it all away, then!" I shouted when he was well beyond hearing. "Damn you, Da, it wasn't my fault either!"

I never did find his bloody horse.

And so, the end of this testament. Why did I tell him, when even the young fool I was then might have guessed how he'd react? I don't know. It's all very well for Socrates to maunder on about how one should know oneself, but sometimes the water is just so deep and murky that you cannot see the bottom. I didn't hate Arthur, not then, but the love was all dried up. I'd never asked to be made the symbol of his own imagined sin.

It was a long walk home. A storm rolled in from the ocean long before I reached my destination. The rain was curiously warm, as if Arthur's god were pissing on his handiwork. Wrapped in my soggy cloak, I trudged back to Lot and Mother's world. ●

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(from page 89)

SECOND SOLUTION TO 1984

	1	2	1.6	4	2.5
4	4	8	6.4	16	10
2.5	2.5	5	4	10	6.25
2	2	4	3.2	8	5
1	1	2	1.6	4	2.5
3.1	3.1	6.2	4.96	12.4	7.75

You see above, along the top and left sides of the Orwellian square, ten numbers that are called the "generators" of the magic square. Observe that each number inside a cell is the product of the generator directly above it and the generator on the left.

If you multiply the ten generators, you'll find that the product is 1984. The procedure of circling cells and crossing out numbers guarantees that no two of the five circled numbers will share a row or column. Because each selected number is the product of a different pair of generators, the five selected numbers must have a product equal to the product of the ten generators, namely 1984.

If you would like to know more about how to construct magic squares of this sort — they can be based on addition as well as multiplication — see the second chapter of my *Scientific American Book of Mathematical Puzzles & Diversions*, a Simon and Schuster paperback.

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THE HARVEST OF WOLVES

art: Odbert

While this is the author's fourth appearance in these pages, we think you'll find this tale a distinct departure from her previous stories. Set in an all-too-realistic near future, it makes one wonder—"What would *I* do?"

by Mary R. Gentl

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Flix sat in the old sagging armchair, leaned forward, and tore another page from the *Encyclopaedia Brittanica*. The fire took it, flickering in the grate.

"What the—" the boy, closing the door as he entered, strode across the room and slapped the book out of her hand. "What's the matter with you? You could *sell* that for—"

"For money to buy fuel?" Flix suggested. Adrenaline made her dizzy. She looked down at her liver-spotted hands, where the veins stood up with age; they were shaking. "Thank you, I prefer to cut out the middle man. Self sufficiency."

He glared; she doubted he recognized irony.

"You're crazy, you know that?"

"If you know it, that ought to be enough. Have your put in your report yet?" She shot the question at him.

He was still young enough to blush. Angry because of it, he snarled, "You keep your mouth shut, citizen. You hear me?"

"I hear you." Age makes you afraid, Flix thought. Pacifying him, she said "Well, what have you brought me?"

"Bread. Milk's out. Can't deliver, there's no transport. I got you some water, though. It's clean."

You wouldn't know clean water if it bit you, Flix thought bitterly. She watched the boy unpacking the plastic bag he carried, throwing the goods into the nearest cupboard. He was growing taller by the week, this one; broad-shouldered with close-cropped black hair, and the changing voice of adolescence.

"Marlow," she said, "what makes you choose community service?"

"Didn't choose it, did I? Got given it, didn't I?"

He straightened, stuffed the bag in the pocket of his uniform jacket, and came over to squat beside the open fire. Though he never admitted it, it attracted him. Probably because he'd never before been in a house old enough to have a grate, she thought.

" 'Community service'," she repeated, unable to keep the edge out of her voice. "Snooping under cover of charity; you call that service? Bringing Welfare rations, weighing me up . . . and all the time new laws, and cutting it closer every time, eh? If they've got as far as these slums, Marlow boy, then pretty soon we'll all be gone."

Resentment glared out of him. "Think I want to come here? Crazy old house, crazy old bitch—"

"That's 'citizen' to you, if you can't manage 'Flix'." She offered him a crumpled pack of cigarettes, forcing a smile. "Only tobacco, I'm afraid."

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The Pavlovian response: "Filthy things'll give you cancer."

"Ah, who'll get me first, then: lung cancer, hypothermia, starvation—or you and your bloody Youth Corps?"

"You got no room to talk—it was your lot got us in this mess in the first place." He stood up. "You think we want to live like this, no jobs, nothing? You got no idea. If it weren't for the Corps I'd be—"

"You'd be waiting out your time on Welfare," Flix said, very carefully. "Seeing the deadline come up. You'd be being tested—like I am now—to see how fit you are to survive. To qualify for government food. To get government water, so you don't die of cholera. Government housing, so you don't die of cold. Instead you're here, waiting for me to—"

"That's the way it is," Marlow said. He lowered his head, glaring at her from dark, hollowed eyes. (Why, she thought, he's been losing sleep.) "You got to produce. You got to work. You got to be worth keeping on Welfare. Or else—and don't tell me it ain't fair. I know it ain't fair, but that's the way it is."

"Ah," she said, on a rising inflection, "is that the way it is."

"*Look* at you!" He swung his arm round, taking in the single-room flat. The wallpaper was covered by old posters, garish with the slogans of the halcyon '90s (that final, brief economic flowering) when protest was easy. Planks propped up on bricks served as shelves for old books and pamphlets and magazines. Some had sat so long in the same place that the damp had made of them an inseparable mass. A long-disconnected computer terminal gathered dust, ancient access codes scratched on the casing. Cracking china lay side by side on the drainer with incongruously new plastic dishes, and a saucepan full of something brown and long-burned sat on the stove. A thin film of plaster from the ceiling had drifted down onto the expanse of worn linoleum, left empty by the clustering of table, chair, and bed round the open fire.

Flix poked the ashes with a burnt slat, and glanced up at the windows. Beyond the wire-mesh, the sky was gray.

"You could fix those boards," she said. "There's a wind whips through there could take the barnacles off a ship's hull, since your friends left me with no glass in the windows. . . . What, no reaction?"

"You can't blame them." The boy sounded tired, and very adult. "Thinking of you in here. Eating, sleeping. Doing nothing to earn it."

"Christ!" Flix exploded, and saw him flinch at the word as he

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always did. But now she wasn't goading him for her amusement. "There was a time you didn't have to *earn* the right to live! You had it—as a human being!"

"Yeah," he said wearily, "I know. I heard about that. I hear about it all the time from my old man. Free this, free that, free the other; holidays in the sun, cars for everybody, everybody working—yeah, I heard. And what happens? What do you leave for *us?* You let the niggers come in and steal your jobs, you let the Yanks put their missiles here! You let kids grow up wild 'cause their mothers were never home; you sell us out to the Reds—"

"Oh, spare me. If you're going to be bigoted, at least be original!"

"Citizen," Marlow said, "shut up."

Not quite under her breath she said, "Ignorant pig."

He yelled, "Why don't you clean this place up? *You* live like a pig!"

"I was never one for housework—and besides, I've got you to do it for me, haven't I? Courtesy of the Welfare state. Until such time as the state decides I'm not worth keeping alive."

His would not be the first report made on her (though the first under this name), but time and purges had culled the number of officials willing to turn a blind eye on changes of code, name, and location.

I am, Flix thought, too old for this fugitive life.

"Pig," Marlow repeated absently. He rummaged around in the toolbox by the window, and began nailing the slats back over the lower windowsill.

"There's coffee in the cupboard." Flix made a peace-offering of it. "Have some if you want it. You'll have to boil the kettle. I think the power's still on."

"Where'd you get *coffee?*"

"I still have friends," Flix observed sententiously. "They can't do much, being as they're old like me; but what they can do, they will. The old network's still there."

"Subversive," he accused.

Lord Brahma! I can't seem to keep off it today, Flix thought. What is it with me—do I *want* to die? Well, maybe. But not to suit their convenience.

"Do you ever listen to anything except what they tell you?"

Marlow whacked the last nail in viciously, threw down the hammer, and stalked over to the sink. Filling the kettle, his back to her, he said, "I know what's right. I know what's true."

"I am sick to death of people who *know*. I want people who aren't sure. I want people who're willing to admit there's another

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side to the argument—or even that there is an argument, for Christ's sake! Marlow, will you bloody look at me!"

He plugged the kettle in. Turning, and leaning back against the chipped unit: "What?"

"You don't believe all that bullshit." Again, he flinched. They are abnormally sensitive, she thought. "You can't believe it, you're not the age. Sixteen's when you go round questioning everything."

"Maybe in your day. It's different now. We got to grow up quick or not at all." He shrugged. "Listen, I'm looking back at it, what it was like—I can see what you can't. While you sat round talking, the commies were taking over the unions; and if it hadn't been for Foster we'd be a satellite state today—"

Flix groaned. "Jesus. Marlow, tell me all the shit you like, tell me we were all commie pinko perverts, tell me we were capitalist running dogs who brought the world to ruin—" she was laughing, an old woman's high cackle "—but in the name of God, don't tell me about your precious Foster! I knew all I needed to know about dictators before you were born!"

His mouth twisted. She could see him lose patience with her.

"You don't know what it's like," Marlow said. "Five of us in a two-room flat, and the power not on, and never enough food, and for why? Because there's no work, and if there was, there's nothing to buy with the money! At least he's making it better. At least there's less of that."

"Where do you go when there's nowhere to go?" Flix asked rhetorically. "I'd OD if you could get the stuff, but that's another thing banned in your bloody utopia. Fetch us the coffee, Marlow, and hand me that half-bottle in the top cupboard."

He was as disapproving as any Youth Cadet, but he did what she asked. Whiskey, and coffee (the last now, the very last) bit into her gut. I am fighting, she reminded herself sourly, I am fighting—God knows why—for my life.

"I suppose it's no good offering you a drink? No, I thought not. Hell, Marlow, loosen up, will you?"

She had, over the weeks, gained some small amusement from tormenting him. Like all of Foster's New Puritans, the Corps strongly disapproved of drugs, blasphemy, lechery—and there, she thought, is a fine old-fashioned word. Not that I've quite got round to that . . . but wouldn't he react beautifully! Or is it that I'm afraid of him laughing? Or afraid of him? For all his 'community service', he's still a thug.

She tore a few more pages from the thick book, crumpled them,

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and poked them into the fire where they flared briefly. "What about coal, Marlow?"

"Reconstituted."

"Christ, that stuff doesn't burn. Still, what the hell. Come and sit down." She watched him kneel by the flames. In the dim cold room, the light made lines on his face; he looked older.

"In the nineties," she said speculatively, "there were, for example, parties without supervisors—supervisors!—and music without propaganda—"

"Without whose propaganda?"

"Bravo, Marlow!" She clapped gently. "Without theirs, of course. With ours. Now it's the other way round. Do you realize, I wouldn't *mind* if he had the grace to be original? But it's the same old thing; no free press, no free speech, no unions; food shortages, rabid patriotic nationalism—"

"You were traitors! Was that any better?"

No way out, she thought, no way in; God preserve us from the voice of invincible ignorance.

"One thing we didn't do," she said. "We didn't weigh people up as to how useful they were to the state—and let them die when they got sick and old."

He was quiet. "Didn't you?"

"We didn't *plan* it."

"There's less poverty now. Less misery. It's a hard world," he said. "They're starving in Asia. Dying. That's not going to happen here. You used it up, this world. So you got yourselves to blame if you don't like what's happening now."

"Marlow," Flix said, "what are you going to say in your report?"

Now there was no evading the question. He looked up with clear puzzled eyes. "I don't want to do it."

"I know, or it wouldn't be nearly a month overdue, would it? No, don't ask me how I know. Like I said, the old grapevine's still there. When are they going to start wondering, Marlow? When are they going to start making reports on *you*?"

He stared into the fire. She got up slowly, taking her weight on her wrists, and went across to pull on her old (now much cracked) leather jacket. The cold got into her bones. Now would I be so weak if there was proper food? she thought. Christ, my mother lived to be eighty, and I'm not within twenty years of that!

"I've got family," Marlow said. "The old man, Macy and the baby. We got to eat."

She could see herself reflected in the speckled wall mirror, lost in sepia depths. An old woman, lean and straight, with spiky

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cropped hair that needed washing from grey to silver. Marlow, out of focus, was a dark uniform and the glint of insignia.

Flix looked straight at him, solemnly; and when his eyes were fixed on her, she smiled. She had always had one of those faces, naturally somber and sardonic, that are transformed when they smile. Vanity doesn't go with age, she thought, savoring the boy's unwilling responsive grin.

"I could have shown you so much—so much. You haven't got the guts to run wild," she said, "you haven't got the guts to *question.*"

The implication of promise was there. He watched her. The light dimmed, scummy and cold; and the fire glowed down to red embers. The ever-present smell of the room, overlain for a while by coffee and spirits, reasserted itself.

"You're a drunk," Marlow said. "D'you think I haven't seen the bottles you throw out—and the ones you hide? Yeah, your friends keep you supplied, all right! I've come in here when you were dead drunk on the bed, place stinking of shit; I've listened to you maundering on about the old days—I don't want to know! If this is where it leaves you, I don't want to know!"

"Is that right?" Tears stung behind her eyes, her voice thinned. "You'll never live the life I lived, and you'll never know how I regret it passing—ah, Jesus, it tears you up, to know it's gone and gone for good. *You* were the people we wanted to help. I mean you, Marlow! And when it came to actually thinking—God knows how difficult that is—you didn't want to know. You'd sooner march with your mobs. You'd sooner smash places up on your witch-hunts. You'd sooner cheer the tanks when they roll by. And God help you, that's not enough, you've got to think you're *right!*"

The boy crossed the room and pushed her. She fell back on the bed with an ugly sound. He stamped back and forth, sweeping the cracked cups crashing to the floor. Violently he kicked at the piles of old books and pamphlets. They scattered in soggy lumps.

"This!" he shouted. "You preach about your precious books and you burn them to keep warm! You talk about your 'subversive network' but what is it really? Old men and women hoarding food and drink, keeping it from us who need it!"

She, breathing heavily and conscious of pain, didn't answer. His first energy spent, he came back and helped her into the chair; and made up the fire until it blazed. The cold wind blew belches of gray smoke back into the room.

Flix felt down into the side of the chair for the hidden bottle

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there; fist knotted about it, letting the alcohol sting her back to life. When she looked up again he was putting on his coat.

As if nothing had happened, she said, "Books aren't sacred. Ideas are, and I've got those up here." She touched her lank hair. "Whatever else we are, we subversives, I'll tell you this—we care about each other. That's more than your Corps will do for you when you're old."

"I'll come in again tomorrow." He was all boy now; gangling, uncertain, sullen.

"I don't care if you don't agree with me! Just think about what you're doing—for once, *think* about it!"

At the door he turned back and said "*Will* they look after you?"

After she heard the door slam, she plugged the power outlet into the antique stereo equipment, and played old and much-mended '90s revival-rock cassettes, blasting the small room full of sound. It served to stop the treadmill-turning of her mind.

"You've got a letter!" Taz yelled down the stairs after her the next morning. She grunted, not taking any notice; the old man (occupier of the building's only other inhabitable room) was given to delusions, to happenings that were years after their time.

But when she crossed the hallway it lay there in the crepuscular light: a thin rough-paper envelope folded and addressed to Citizen Felicity Vance. Flix picked it up, wincing at the pain in her back. An immature hand, the letters mostly printed. So she knew.

She took it into her room, closing the door and resting her old bones on the bed.

Where is there anyone I can tell? she thought. That's another one of the boy's taunts— 'if you had a husband, citizen'. Ah, but I could never live in anyone's company but my own.

Now it came to it she was afraid. Shaking, sweating; the old cold symptoms. She opened the letter.

"Citizen—

"I have to tell the truth. They check up on me too. It is the truth. You drink too much and your alone and cant take care. I have to live. If your friends are good friends you better tell them I sent my report in. Its not your fault things are like this. Im sorry I said it was. Sometimes I wisht I lived in the old days it might have been good. But I dont think so not for most of us.

"Peter Marlow"

She dressed slowly; fashions once adopted from a mythical past and previous revolutions: old jeans and sweater and the ancient leather jacket—the smell took her back, with the abruptness of

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illusion, to boys and bikes and books; to bright libraries, computer networks; to Xerox and duplicators, to faxsheets in brilliant colors that had been going to change the world.

He believes I'm a drunken old woman, alone, friends no more than geriatrics; he has to report me or be reported himself—and does he hope that it's more than an illusion, that some secret subversive organization still exists to whisk me off to—what? Safety? Where?

Things are bad all over, kid.

But at least he's sent in the report.

She left, locking the door behind her. It was a long time and a long walk to where she could borrow a working telephone. When she called the number, it was a while before it was answered; and a while before he remembered her name.

"Well," Flix said, "you'll have had the report by now."

"You're a fool," the man said. "You won't last a week in the Welfare camps! Flix—"

"I'll last long enough to tell what I know," Flix said. "About you—and who your father was—and what 'societies' you used to belong to. I'll do it, Simon. Maybe it won't make much difference, maybe it won't even lose you your job. But you won't have much of a career afterwards."

After a pause he said, "What do you want?"

"I want somewhere decent to live. I want to be warm. I want enough to eat, I want to play my music and read my books in peace. That's all. I'm tired of living like a pig! I want a place like the one you've got put by for yourself when *you* get old. No Welfare camps for Foster's boys, right? Now they'll put me in one—they can't ignore that report—and when they do, you know what I'm going to say!"

She could feel his uncertainty over the line, knew she had to weight things in her favor.

"Would it help," she said, "if you could turn in a few of the old subversive cells, by way of a sweetener? Those that didn't know you, those that can't give us away."

" 'Us'." His tone reluctantly agreed complicity, barely masked contempt. "Names?"

"Names after, not before."

And he agreed.

Flix grinned to herself, a fox-grin full of teeth and no humor. You and me both, Marlow, she thought; you and me both. . . .

"Like someone once told me," she said, "I have to live." ●

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TIME BRIDE

by Gardner Dozois & Jack Dann

Like all time-travel stories,
this one doesn't bear thinking
about *too* hard—the paradoxes
start to fly fast and furious.
Yet in the capable hands
of Mr. Dozois and Mr. Dann,
this all hangs together
rather neatly. The authors
have collaborated previously,
most notably on anthologies
for Berkley Books. Their latest is *Cats!*

art: D. Della Ratta

The man-who-wasn't-there first spoke to Marcy when she was eight years old.

She had gone out to play with her friends Shelley Mitnich and Michelle Liebman, a rare time out from under the eyes of her strict and overprotective parents, and in later years she would come to remember that long late-summer afternoon as an idyll of freedom and happiness, in many ways the last real moments of her childhood.

The sky was high and blue and cloudless, the sun warm without being blisteringly hot, the breezes balmy, and as they played, time seemed to stretch out, slow down, and then stop altogether, hanging suspended like honey melting on the tongue. They played Mother May I, halfball, Chinese jump rope, and giant steps. They played jacks—onesies, twosies, threesies, sweepsies, and squeezesies. They played hide-and-go-seek. They played Red Light Green Light, and Red Rover, and Teakettle Hot Teakettle Cold. They played double-dutch. They played Mimsy, chanting

a mimsy, a *clapsie*
I *whirl* my hands to *bapsie*
my *right* hand
my *left* hand
high as the *sky*
low as the *sea*
touch my *knee*

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touch my *heel*
touch my *toe*
and under we *go!*

while they went through a complicated routine of throwing a ball up and clapping before catching it, throwing a ball up and whirling their hands and touching their shoulders (*bapsie*) before catching it, and so forth, until at last they threw the ball under their legs on the final word, their faces as grimly intent and serious as the faces of druids performing holy mysteries at the summer solstice. And when Shelly got mad and went home because she got stuck on the Qs while playing A My Name Is Alice, and Marcy *hadn't*—coming right out with "Q my name is Queenie, my husband's name is Quintin, we come from Queensbury where we sell *quilts*," cool as could be, making it look infuriatingly easy—Michelle and Marcy kept right on playing, playing hop-scotch, playing dolls, playing Movie Star, in which Michelle pretended to be Nick Charles and Marcy got to be Nora and walk a pillow named Asta on a leash. And when Michelle had to go in because it was time for her dumb piano lesson, Marcy kept on playing by herself, not wanting the afternoon to end, reluctant to go back to the gloomy old house where there was nothing to do but watch television or sit in her room and play pretend games, which weren't any fun because she felt *locked-up* in that house.

Marcy ran through the scrub lots behind the houses, swishing through the waist-high tangles of grass and wild wheat and weeds, pretending to be a horse. Usually when she played horses it was with Michelle and yucky old Shelley—Marcy's name was *Lightning*, and she was a beautiful black horse with a white mane and white tail, and Michelle was Star, and Shelley was Blaze—and she hadn't been sure that she would like playing horses all by herself, with nobody to run from forest fires with or chase rustlers with, but she found that she *did* like it. Running alone and free, the wind streaming her hair out behind her, the sky seeming to whirl dizzily around her as she ran, running so fast that she thought that she could run right off the edge of the world, so far and fast that no one could ever catch her again—yes, she liked it very much, perhaps more than she had ever liked anything up to that moment.

She ran through the scrub lots and the patches of trash woods—pines and aspens growing like weeds—and down through the sunlit meadow to the river.

There she paused to catch her breath, teetering dramatically on the riverbank with her arms stretched out to either side. This

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time of year, the river ran nearly dry—just the barest trickle of water, perhaps an inch deep, worming its way through a dry bed littered with thousands of rocks of all sizes and shapes, from tiny rounded pebbles to boulders the size of automobiles—but Marcy pretended that she was about to fall in and maybe drown, so that Mommy would be sorry, or maybe she'd have to swim like *anything* to escape, or maybe a mermaid would save her and take her to a magic cave. . . . She whirled around and around on the riverbank, her arms still outstretched to either side. She was one of those classically beautiful children who look like Dresden-china figurines, with wide liquid eyes and pale blemishless skin and finely chiseled features, an adult face done in miniature. She was wearing a new blue dress trimmed with eyelet lace, and her hair shone like beaten gold as she spun in the sunlight.

She whirled until she was too dizzy to stand, and then she sat down with a plop in the mud of the riverbank, which was still soggy from the morning's rain. She was dismayed for a second, realizing what she'd done; then she smiled, and began to pat her hands in the mud with a kind of studied perversity.

"You shouldn't play in the mud," an adult voice said sternly.

She flinched and looked up—expecting to see one of the neighbors, or perhaps a workman from the new house they were putting up on the far side of the meadow.

No one was there.

"You're getting your dress all muddy that way," the voice complained, "and I can just imagine how much your mother must have had to pay for it, too. Have some consideration for others!"

Marcy stood up slowly, feeling gooseflesh prickle along her arms. Again, no one was there. Carefully, she looked all around her, but there was no place for anyone to hide—the grass was too short here, and the nearest clump of trees was a hundred yards away—so she didn't see how anyone could be playing a trick on her.

She stood there silently, frowning, trying to figure it out, still composed but beginning to be a little scared. The wind ruffled her hair and fluttered the lace on her muddy dress.

"You're the one," the voice said gloatingly. It seemed to emanate from the thin air right beside her, loud and unmistakable. "I knew it as soon as I saw you. Yes, you're the right one—you'll do very nicely indeed, I can tell. Boy, am I going to get my money's worth out of this. Every cent—it's worth it."

The voice sounded smug, pleased-with-itself, somewhat pompous. Like the voice of one of those sanctimonious and not-terribly-

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bright adults who would always insist on telling her stories with a moral or giving her Words To Live By, the kind of adults who would show slides of their vacation trip, or pinch her cheeks and tell her how big she was getting, like her Uncle Irving, who always stunk up the house with cigar smoke and whose droning-voiced company was more annoying than the nickel he invariably gave her was worth. A *schlimazel*, as her father would say, a *schlimazel*'s voice, coming at her out of the empty August sky.

"Are you a ghost?" she asked politely, more intrigued than frightened now.

The voice chuckled. "No, I'm not a ghost."

"Are you invisible, then, like on TV?"

"Well . . ." the voice said, "I guess I'm not really *there* at all, the way you mean it, although I can see you and talk to you whenever I want, little Marcia."

Marcy shook her head. In spite of him saying that he wasn't a ghost, she pictured him as one, as a little-man-who-wasn't-there, like in the poem Mommy had read her, and for a long time that would be the way she would think of him. "How did you know my name?" she asked.

The man-who-wasn't-there chuckled smugly again. "I know lots of things, Marcia, and I can find out nearly anything I want to know. My name is Arnold Waxman, and someday I'm going to marry you."

"No you're *not*," she said, startled.

"Oh, yes I am. I'm going to be your husband, little Marcia, you'll see. With my guidance you're going to grow up to be a perfect young lady, the perfect bride, and when the time is right, you'll marry me."

"Oh, no I *won't*," she said, more vehemently, feeling tears start in her eyes. "I won't, I *won't*. You're a liar, a yucky old *liar*."

"Have some respect!" the man-who-wasn't-there said sharply. "Is this a way to talk to your future husband?"

But Marcy was already running, whizzing suddenly away like a stone shot out of a sling, up the slope, across the meadow, past the foundations for the new house. Not until she reached the first line of trees, the riverbank far behind her, did she whirl and yell back, "I'm not going to marry you, you dumb old ghost! I'm not!"

"Oh, I think you will," said a voice beside her, from the thin and empty summer air.

Barry Meisner, Marcy's father, was putting on his *tallis* and

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tefillin, preparing to pray, when a voice spoke to him out of the ceiling: "Mr. Meisner? I have a proposition to make to you."

"What?" Mr. Meisner said, turning around, as if the voice might have emanated out of the red leather bar across the room. He cautiously walked over to the bar and looked behind it, but found nothing more than his collection of vintage wines, a towel that had fallen to the floor, and a bottlecap that the maid had overlooked.

"So now you're hearing things," Mr. Meisner mumbled, scolding himself.

"Mr. Meisner," said the voice clearly, "please, just listen to me for a moment, and I'll explain everything."

"Oh, my God!" Mr. Meisner said, now looking straight up at the ceiling light which spotlit the bar and the ivory collection which filled the narrow mirrored shelves on the wall behind it. Mr. Meisner, a successful businessman who attributed his success to a personal God who took a particular interest in *him*, Mr. Meisner, suddenly began to shake. "Oh, my *God.* I always *knew* you were real. I'm your son, Barry," and he raised his arms before him and intoned the *Shema:* "Hear Oh Israel, the—"

"*Please,* Mr. Meisner," said the voice, "I am most certainly *not* God. Now if you'll just listen—"

Mr. Meisner lowered his arms reluctantly. "You're not God?"

"Absolutely not."

"Then who are you, *what* are you?" Mr. Meisner looked this way and that. "Come out! Show yourself!"

"I can't show myself, Mr. Meisner, because I'm from the future."

"The future!"

"That's right," said the voice, sounding somewhat smug.

Mr. Meisner squinted suspiciously up at the ceiling. "So, you're from the future, huh? You have a time machine, maybe, like in the movies? So, you want to talk to a person, why don't you step out and say hello, instead of doing tricks like a ventriloquist with the ceiling?"

"Mr. Meisner," the voice said, and you could almost hear the sigh behind the words, "there is no such thing as a time machine. Not the kind that you're talking about, anyway. It's quite impossible for anybody to *physically* travel through time. Or so the scientists tell me—I must admit that I don't really understand it myself. But the point is that I *can't* step out and shake hands with you, because I'm not really *there,* not physically. You understand? Now what I *do* have is a device that lets me *see* through time, and enables me to speak to you, and hear what you have

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to say in return. And let me tell *you,* Mr. Meisner, it's expensive. The timescopes were developed only a little while ago (from my point of view, of course), and you wouldn't *believe* how much it's costing me to talk to you right now."

"Long distance calls are always expensive," Mr. Meisner said blandly; he had regained some of his composure, and he wasn't about to let a voice from the ceiling think that it could impress him by bragging about its money. He idly fingered the loose leather strap of the *tefillin* while he looked thoughtfully upward. "So, then, Mr. Voice—" he said at last.

"Mr. Meisner, *please.* I'm not a voice, I'm a person just like you, and I have a name. My name is Arnold Waxman."

Mr. Meisner blinked. "So, then Mr. . . . Waxman," he began again. "So you're up there in the future, and you're calling me, and it's costing you a million dollars a minute, or whatever they use for money in the future, and any time now the operator is going to break in and start yelling you should put another dime in the slot. . . ." He paused. "So what do you want? Why are you bothering *me?"*

"I'd like to speak to you about your daughter, Marcy."

"What about my daughter?" demanded Mr. Meisner, startled again.

"I would like your permission to marry her."

"Marry her? Are you a pervert, is that it?" Mr. Meisner began shaking with anger and fear. No one was going to marry his daughter. She wasn't even *bat mitzvahed* yet. Suddenly he stopped, and buried his face in his hands. "I *am* hearing things," Mr. Meisner said flatly, satisfied that he had finally had a breakdown. "*Now* let my wife deny that I've been working too hard."

A sigh filled the room. "Mr. Meisner, you're not crazy. You're living in the 20th century; please try to act like a civilized man, not some superstitious aborigine."

"*You* should talk about civilized! My daughter is *eight years old.* Is this what they do in the future, marry eight-year-old girls?" A thought struck him, and he began to panic. "Where is she? Oh my God, is she alright? What—"

"Calm yourself, Mr. Meisner," Arnold said. "Your daughter is fine; in fact, she's on her way home right now."

"She better be okay," Mr. Meisner said ominously.

"Please let me explain, Mr. Meisner. I don't want to marry Marcy *now.* I want to marry her in the future, ten years from now, when she's eighteen. That is, I believe, an acceptable age.

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And I am, as I believe I've already mentioned, a very rich man. A very respectable man. She could do far worse, believe me."

Mr. Meisner shook his head dubiously. "I should arrange a marriage like my Grandmother who lived in a *shtetl?"*

"I think you will find that the old ways contained much wisdom."

"Are you Jewish?" Mr. Meisner asked suspiciously.

"Of course I'm Jewish. Would I want to marry your daughter if I wasn't?"

"We're not Orthodox," said Mr. Meisner.

"Neither am I," Arnold said.

"No—come back in ten years when you're real and we can talk again. Until then, you're a figment of my imagination."

"You know perfectly well that I'm real, Mr. Meisner," Arnold said angrily, "and in ten years it will be too late for Marcy."

"What do you mean?"

"Mr. Meisner, do you have any idea what's going *on* up here in the future?"

Mr. Meisner shrugged. "I should know the future? I have enough trouble with the present."

"Well, let me tell *you,* you think it's bad down there *now,* you just wait until you see the future! It's a zoo. A jungle. The complete breakdown of all moral values. Kids running wild. Lewdness. Indecency. Do you want to live to see the day when your daughter is *schtupping* every boy she passes on the street?"

"Don't you dare talk like that about my daughter!"

"Mr. Meisner, without my guidance, *she'll marry a goy!"*

There was a heavy silence. "That's a lie," Mr. Meisner said at last, but he said it without much conviction. He paused again, then sighed. "So if I make an arrangement with you, how will that change what happens to my Marcy?"

"I'll look after her. I'll help her through the pitfalls of life. I'll make sure she grows up *right."*

"I can do that myself, thank you," said Mr. Meisner.

"Ah, but you can't watch over her *all* the time, can you?" Arnold said triumphantly. "In fact, just today I caught her rolling in the mud, deliberately getting her dress dirty, and I sent her straight home. Can *you* know what other trouble she'll get into when your back is turned? Can you guard her from every bad influence she'll run into outside the home, point out every mistake to her as she makes it, help her to resist every temptation she'll ever run into, anywhere? *I* can do all that."

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"But . . ." said Mr. Meisner, rather dazedly, "why are you willing to wait ten years for my daughter?"

"So that I can make absolutely *sure* that she's the kind of woman I want to marry." Arnold sighed. "I've been disappointed twice before, Mr. Meisner, with fiancées who were girls from good families, supposedly well brought up . . . and yet, underneath it all, it turned out that they were really . . . sluts. They had been *spoiled,* in spite of their good backgrounds, in spite of all their parents could do. Somewhere along the line, Mr. Meisner, *somewhere,* at some time, the germ of corruption had worked its way in." He paused broodingly, and then, his voice quickening with enthusiasm, said, "But *this* way, using the timescope, I can actually help to mold Marcy into the type of girl she should be, I can personally supervise every detail. . . ."

The study door opened, and Marcy was standing there, looking flushed and rather flustered, her dress splattered with mud. "Daddy—" she began breathlessly.

"There! See!" Arnold said smugly. "*There* she is, and she's perfectly all right. And look, there's the mud, just like I told you. . . ."

Marcy gasped and flinched, and fell back a step, her eyes widening. Her face filled with fright, and, after a moment, with guilt.

Her father was staring at her oddly. "Go upstairs now, Marcy," he said at last. "We'll talk about what you did to your dress later on."

"But, *Daddy* . . ."

"Go upstairs now," Mr. Meisner said curtly, "I'm very busy."

As the door was swinging shut, he turned his face back up to the ceiling and said, "Now, then, Mr. Waxman—"

Marcy stood outside the door of her father's study for a long time, listening to the voices rising and falling within, and then, troubled, she went slowly upstairs to her room.

That night, as she was getting ready to turn out her light and go to sleep, the voice spoke to her again. She shrieked and jumped into bed and pulled the covers up over her head. She lay there quivering, somehow shocked that the voice could follow her even into her very own room. The voice droned on for what seemed like an eternity while she hugged the covers tighter and tried not to listen, telling her stupid stories about how wonderful their lives together would be, the wonderful things they would do, how they would live in a castle. . . .

Later, after her room had become quiet again, she cautiously

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poked one eye and her nose out from under the blanket, looked warily around, and then snaked her hand over to turn out the light, hoping that *he* wouldn't be able to find her in the dark.

They were lies, she told herself as she stared up at the shadowy ceiling of her room, all the things he'd said, all lies. None of that was going to happen. Marcy already had her life planned anyway: she was going to live in the Congo and be like Wonder Woman who never had to marry anybody, even though everybody was in love with her because she saved people's lives all the time and was beautiful.

There would be no room in such a plan for *Arnold.*

The next day, at dinner, Marcy's mother said, "But, Marcy, this is for your own good." She and Mr. Meisner and Marcy were seated at the kitchen table. "Arnold sounds like a very nice man, and Mommie and Daddy and Arnold are going to make sure that you have a wonderful life and have everything you want."

"I don't want everything I want," Marcy whined. "Not if I have to listen to that dumb old Arnold all the time. I won't, I won't, I *won't.*"

"Now that certainly isn't the way a young lady speaks to her parents." Arnold's voice seemed to be coming from the radar range under the Colonial-style kitchen cabinets. "Little Marcia, do you—"

"Don't call me 'Little Marcia.' My name is Marcy, and I'm not little."

"Very well," said Arnold. "Marcy, do you remember the Ten Commandments?"

Marcy looked down at her bowl of strawberry ice cream, and then carefully mashed the artificially colored mounds flat with the back of her teaspoon.

"Well, *do* you remember the Ten Commandments?" Mrs. Meisner asked. Mrs. Meisner had once been beautiful, but she had allowed herself to gain weight, which clouded the once-strong features of her face. But she still had beautiful pale skin and eyes as pale blue as Marcy's. She wore her thick, dyed red hair shoulder-length, but it was sprayed so heavily that it shone as if it were shellacked. "Marcy, stop playing with your ice cream and answer Arnold. And be polite!"

"I know you're not supposed to steal or kill anybody or eat lobster," Marcy said sullenly.

"But you *are* supposed to respect your parents . . . and your elders." Now Arnold's stern voice seemed to be coming from some-

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where above the table. " 'Honor thy father and mother,' " the voice intoned ominously.

"Not if they try to make me marry a stupid old voice!" Marcy said, and she ran out of the kitchen, through the red-carpeted hallway, and up the stairs to her bedroom.

"I think you owe your parents an apology," the voice said to Marcy, who was lying on her bed, her arms extended as if she were flying or perhaps floating.

Marcy stuck her tongue out at the ceiling, which was where she thought Arnold might be.

"I think a spanking would be in order unless you apologize to your parents this very moment," Arnold said.

"Who's going to spank me?" Marcy asked petulantly. "You?"

"I think your father is very capable of taking care of that."

"Well, he's *never* spanked me ever, so shut up and go away."

Five minutes later, Marcy received her first spanking from her father.

The first few weeks under the new regime weren't *too* bad, although Arnold was an awful pest, and nagged her a lot, particularly when her parents weren't around. By now, everybody was talking about the Voices from the future—more than thirty different cases had been reported from all over the globe, the contacts initiated for a bewildering variety of reasons, most of them amazingly frivolous—but Arnold at first was reasonably discreet about lecturing her in front of other people, and only Marcy's parents knew about him.

All that ended, along with the last shreds of her old life, one night, perhaps a month later, when Marcy was having dinner at Shelley Mitnich's house.

"Are you *sure* your parents won't mind if you eat this?" Mrs. Mitnich asked Marcy as she served a platter filled with lobster tails. She also placed a little bowl of melted butter between Marcy and Shelley.

"No, they don't mind," Marcy said. "We can't eat it at home, but I'm allowed to have it in restaurants or at my friends', like here." Lobster was Marcy's favorite food.

Mr. Mitnich mumbled something Marcy couldn't hear, and Mrs. Mitnich gave him a nasty look.

"Well, I know your parents aren't Orthodox," Mrs. Mitnich said; but before Marcy could put a piece of the pink meat into her mouth, a voice said, "Put that fork down this very instant!"

"Shut up, Arnold!" Marcy shouted. Her face turned red, and

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she looked around the dining room, as if Arnold would suddenly appear in the flesh to mortify her.

"You know better than to eat *traif*," Arnold said.

With shocked expressions on their faces, Shelley and her parents looked around the room and then at Marcy.

"I can eat whatever I want," Marcy whined. "My parents let me eat whatever I want when I'm out . . . and it's none of your business, you goddam *geek!*"

"Little girls with breeding do not use such language," Arnold said.

"Who the hell are you?" Mr. Mitnich asked as he stood up and waved his hands over the table where the voice seemed to be coming from, as if he could brush it away like a spiderweb. "I've heard all about weirdos like you." Then he leaned over toward Marcy and asked, "Honey, when did this weirdo from the future start bothering you?"

"I *beg* your pardon, sir," said the voice, which seemed to be coming from the far side of the room now.

"Shut up, you," Mr. Mitnich said to the wall, and then he turned toward Marcy again. "Do your parents know about this pervert?"

"They most certainly do, sir," Arnold said smugly. "I've arranged to marry Marcy when she's of age. I'm simply trying to save her from *your* daughter's fate. If that's being a pervert, then so be it."

"And just what *is* my daughter's fate?" Mr. Mitnich asked, looking at the wall.

"I'd rather not say."

Mr. Mitnich was livid. "Get out of here, you! Oh . . . and Marcy . . . I don't think you should be playing with Shelley any more. Your parents should be ashamed of themselves. Bringing such filth into their own home . . . and ours."

"You just wait and see what happens to *your* daughter," Arnold said nastily. "Boy! You should only be so lucky to have someone like me to look after her!"

Mr. Mitnich threw his coffee cup at the ceiling.

Then Marcy was outside, trudging along toward her house as the bitter tears runneled her cheeks, and Arnold was telling her that she didn't need friends like that anyway, because after all, she had *him*.

After that, the word got out and Marcy became a minor celebrity for a while, even appearing on a television news program. This was small comfort to Marcy, though—Arnold became more and

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more strict as time went by, reprimanding her constantly in front of the other kids, snapping at children and adults whom he thought were "bad influences," until eventually no one would play with her at all. She had lost all her friends, and even her teachers tended to leave her alone, tucking her away in back of the class where they could safely ignore her.

Arnold was with her nearly all the time now, and Marcy soon learned that it was nearly impossible to hide from him. When she hid under the azalea bush in the backyard and "touched herself," Arnold was suddenly there too, thundering wrath from out of the cloudy sky, loudly telling her parents about the disgusting thing their daughter had been doing, and Marcy had to promise never to do it again, and cried herself to sleep from the shame of it every night for a week. When Marcy stole a chocolate-covered cherry from her mother's candy-box, Arnold was there. When Marcy wiped her nose on the sleeve of her new jacket, Arnold was there. When Marcy tried to hide her report card, Arnold was there. When Marcy let Diane Berkowitz talk her into trying a cigarette, Arnold was there.

He came to her every day and lectured her about morality and sin and perversion. He loved to talk about etiquette and deportment, and he made her read thick musty books to "expand her horizons."

He told her in secret that her parents weren't very smart or, for that matter, very well educated.

He told her that he was her only friend.

He told her that she was very lucky to have him, for he was her salvation.

Soon after Marcy's fifteenth birthday, someone finally invented the timescope, belatedly justifying the prophecy of its existence. The inventor had been prompted by hints and "pointers" from the future, but with the exception of a few nitpicking scientists, no one seemed particularly disturbed by the hair-raising tangle of paradoxes this implied. Within a year, timescopes were for sale on the commercial market, although they were indeed very expensive to own and operate.

Soon after Marcy's sixteenth birthday, Shelley Mitnich got pregnant, and by a *shvartzer* yet: Arnold crowed about that for months, and his stock with Mr. Meisner became unassailably high.

Soon after Marcy's seventeenth birthday, she tried talking to her mother about Arnold. Marcy still didn't see any way out of

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marrying Arnold if her parents said that she had to—although if she'd been a few years older, or less dominated by her parents and Arnold, or if her counselor at school had been sympathetic enough to really open up to, or if she'd had any real friends with whom to talk things over, she might have seen several other options—and the prospect terrified her. Mrs. Meisner put down the *Soap Opera Digest* and listened patiently to her daughter, but her tired fat face was unsympathetic. "You don't love him," Mrs. Meisner said. She made a rotating motion with her hand and said, "So? You can't learn to love a rich man just as easily as a poor one?"

Marcy's eighteenth birthday was approaching. She lay unsleeping in the close darkness of her room, night after night, listening to the buzzing and clicking of the street lamp outside her window, watching the glow of car headlights sweep across the ceiling in oscillating waves, like phosphorescent surf breaking on a black midnight beach.

In the mornings, the face that looked back at her from her mirror was haggard and pale. She began to grow gaunt, the flesh pulling back tightly over her cheekbones, her eyes becoming hollowed and darkly bruised. She had almost stopped eating. During the day she would pace constantly, like a caged animal, unable to stand still, awash with a sick, directionless energy that left her headachy and nauseous. At night she would lie rigid and unmoving in her bed, still as a statue, the blankets pulled up to her neck, taut with dread and anticipation of the voice that might speak to her from the darkness at any moment, without warning, the voice and the watching presence she could never escape. . . .

On the third such night, lying tensely in darkness and watching leaf-shadows shake and reticulate across the walls, she made her decision.

Slowly, cautiously, she pushed the blankets aside and got out of bed. She groped across the room to the dresser, not daring to turn on the light, finding her things by touch. Since puberty, since her body hair had begun to grow and her breasts had started to bloom, she had kept her room totally dark at night, unable to bear the thought of *him* staring at her while she undressed; she had taken to dressing under the sheet in the morning, hurrying through baths and showers as quickly as she could, certain that he was staring at her nakedness whenever he got the chance, convinced that she could feel his eyes crawling over her whenever she was obliged to take off the swaddling, smothering, all-con-

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cealing clothes she had come to prefer. Tucked away under the shapeless, tent-like dresses, though, she still kept a pair of jeans and a dark blue cardigan sweater, perhaps unconsciously saved for an emergency like this. She fumbled her way into the clothes, hesitating after every movement, trying to inch her dresser drawer open soundlessly and freezing for a long terrified moment when it emitted a loud raucous squeak, glancing compulsively upward at the milky ceiling (where *he* lived, or so the child in the back of her mind still believed), more than half-expecting to hear his voice any second, asking her in that snide and chilly tone just *what* in the world she thought she was *doing*. But by the time she had tied the last lace on her sneakers, crouching in the deep shadow of the chiffonier, she had begun to feel a little more confident—she had been quiet and unrebellious for a long time now, she hadn't tried to sneak out of her room at night for *years*, and even *he* couldn't watch her *all* the time, every moment. He had to sleep *sometime*, after all.

Maybe it was going to work.

No longer moving with quite the same exaggerated stealth, Marcy slid her window open and climbed out onto the slanting second-story roof. Surely if *he* were watching, he would say something *now* . . . but then she was outside, feeling the slippery tile under her feet, seeing the fat pale moon overhead through a scrim of silhouetted branches, and still the alarm hadn't come. She walked surefootedly along the roof to the big elm that grew at the corner of the house, leaped across to it, and shimmied down it to the ground in a shower of brittle leaves and displaced twigs, and only when she was standing on the ground, her feet planted firmly in the damp grass, only then did she sway and become dizzy. . . .

The bus into the center of town stopped right across from her house, but she caught it a few blocks down, just to be safe. She held her breath until the bus doors sighed shut behind her, and then she slumped into a seat, and was taken by a fit of convulsive shivering. She had to wrap her hands around the edge of the seat in front of her and squeeze it until her knuckles whitened before the shivering stopped, and when it had, and she was calmer, she was content to just sit for a moment and watch the pastel lights of the city ticking by outside the window. But she mustn't allow herself to be lulled. She mustn't allow herself to think that she was safe, not yet. She had worked it all out a dozen times. There was no sense in just running away—sooner or later, Arnold would find out where she had gone, track her down no matter where she

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went, and then her parents would just come and get her, or send the cops to pick her up. And the next time they'd watch her more closely, make it far more difficult for her to get away. No, it was now or never; she must use this opportunity *now,* while she had the chance, and there was only one thing she could think of to do with the stolen time that *might* be effective enough to break her free of Arnold.

She had become uneasy again, thinking about it. How much time *did* she have? Maybe a few hours . . . at the most. Possibly as little as a half-an-hour, twenty minutes, maybe *less.* Sooner or later, the alarm would sound. . . . She felt the tension building up inside her again, like a hand rhythmically squeezing her guts, and she began to look anxiously around her at the people getting on and off the bus. She had not worked out the logistical details, the practical details, of her plan—she had vaguely imagined going to a bar, or a nightclub (but what if they wouldn't let her in?), or maybe to a bowling alley, or a restaurant, or . . . But she didn't have *time* for all that! Any minute now, the alarm was going to come, she *knew* it. She was running out of *time.* . . . And now the bus was emptying out, there were fewer and fewer people getting on. . . .

There was a man sitting a few seats away, reading a magazine. *You're it,* she thought. *You'll have to be it.* Gritting her teeth, she somehow forced herself to stand up, take a swaying step down the aisle toward him. He was probably a goy, but he was clean-looking anyway, his hair a bit longer than she liked it (and—ugh!—a mustache), dressed in slacks and a workshirt and an Eisenhower jacket, hushpuppies, plastic eyeglasses . . . She took another step toward him, feeling her legs turning to rubber, her knees buckling, the fluttery panic coming up inside her.

At least he was *old*—he must be twenty-one, maybe even twenty-two. An older man, that should make it easier. . . .

The bus accelerated with a jolt, and Marcy took the next few steps in a stumbling half-run, almost falling, sprawling into the seat next to the man and then lurching against him as the bus took a sharp curve, knocking the magazine out of his hands. He stared at her, startled, and Marcy drew herself up and said "Hi!", brightly, showing all of her teeth to him in what was supposed to be a smile. He kept staring at her, blankly, and so she leaned in until their faces were nearly touching, and said "Hiiiii there," making her voice low and drawly, fanning her eyelashes, trying desperately to remember what the vamps on television did. He blinked, and then said "Uh . . . hi."

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There was a long silence then, and they stared at each other through it while the bus bounced and swayed around them.

My God, my god, *say* something.

What?

"You know," she said, her voice harsh with tension, so that she had to swallow and start speaking again, "you know, you're a very good-looking man."

"I *am?"* he said, gaping at her.

"Yes, you're a very attractive guy." She looked up sidelong at him, up from under her eyelashes. "I mean—really you are. You know, *really*." She batted her eyelashes at him again. "What's your name, anyway? Mine's Marcy."

"Uh . . . Alan," he said. He was beginning to smile in a sort of tentatively-fatuous way, although he still looked puzzled. "My name's Alan."

She leaned in even closer, until she could feel his breath on her face. It smelled faintly of pepperoni, faintly of mouthwash. She fixed him with a long, smoulderingly-significant look, then said, "Hi, Alan," in a breathless whisper.

"Hi . . . um, Marcy . . ." he said. He still looked nervous, glancing around to see if anyone else was watching this. She took his arm, and he jumped a little. She could feel herself blushing, but she couldn't stop now. "I was sitting over there watching you," she said, "and I said to myself, you can't let a guy this gorgeous get away without even saying *hello* or something, you know? No matter *how* forward he thinks you are. . . . I mean, I'd like to get to know you better, Alan. Would *you* like to get to know *me* better, too? Would you?"

Alan licked nervously at his lips. "Why sure. We could go out . . . We could, uhhh, go to the movies or something, I guess, or go get a coke. . . ."

Too long! This was all taking too long!

She gritted her teeth, and put her hand in his lap.

He goggled at her, and through buzzing waves of embarrassment she was surprised to see that he was blushing too, blushing red as a beet.

"Jesus Christ . . ." he whispered.

No turning back now. "I . . . I want to be alone with you," Marcy said, her voice wavering, forcing herself to keep her hand there. "Don't you have someplace we can go?"

"Yeah," he said in a strangled voice, "we can go to my place. . . ."

They got off a few stops later, and walked down half-lit streets to Alan's apartment. Marcy was hanging on to Alan's arm as

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though he might float up and away into the evening sky if she didn't guy him down, and he was walking so quickly that he was dragging her along, her feet almost not touching the sidewalk. He was chattering nervously, talking a mile a minute, but she hadn't heard a word he'd said. She could feel the tension building higher and tighter inside her, she could almost *smell* it, a scorched smell like insulation burning. She was almost out of time—she knew it, she *knew* it. Dammit, hurry *up*.

Alan's apartment was a fifth-floor walk-up in a battered old brownstone building that had seen better centuries, let alone better years. There was a couch, a bookcase made of boards and bricks, a coffee table, empty wine bottles with candles melted into them, a lamp with a red light bulb in it, rock posters on the walls. He took her coat and threw it over a chair, and then turned to her, rubbing his hands on his hips, looking uncertain again. "Ah, would you like a drink, or . . ."

"Don't talk." She slid into his arms. "I . . . I *need* you, Alan," she said huskily, remembering lines from a romance novel, too young to realize that he was young enough not to giggle. "Take me, take me *now!*"

Then—thank God! at last!—he was kissing her, while she tried not to fidget with impatience. After a moment's reluctance, she opened her lips and let him put his tongue in her mouth; she could feel it wandering clumsily around in there, bumping into her teeth, wagging back and forth like some kind of spongy organic windshield-wiper. His tongue felt huge and bloated in her mouth, and it made her feel a little ill, but he was making a sort of low moaning noise while he was kissing her, so apparently she was on the right track.

After a moment, he began fumbling with the buttons on her cardigan sweater, so clumsily that she had to help him, her own fingers shaking with nervousness. Then he was easing her blouse off. It felt odd to be standing in a strange room, in front of a stranger, in her brassiere, but she didn't have time to worry about it. It *couldn't* be much longer before they caught up with her. . . . Somehow he had figured out how to get the hooks undone. He tugged her brassiere off, and ran his hands over her breasts. She still felt nothing but anxiety.

He leaned down and put his mouth to her breast, and that *was* pleasurable in a low-key way, as if there were a mild electric current shooting through her, but she didn't have *time* for all these frills. "Hurry *up,*" she snarled, tugging clumsily at his belt, breaking a fingernail, finally getting his pants open.

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He threw her down on the couch, and they wrestled inconclusively together for a while—she staring up at the waterpocked ceiling with dread, and thinking hurry *up*, hurry *up*, hurry *up*, banging her chin on his shoulder for emphasis—but of course he was too nervous. He smiled weakly at her and said something apologetic, but she ignored all that and reached for him determinedly. She was blushing furiously now, blushing to her hairroots, but she worked grimly away at him, telling herself that it was not that much different from milking a cow, something she'd done one summer at 4H Camp.

He rolled onto her again, hovered fumblingly above her, poised, and at that moment a loud furious voice said "You *slut!!*"

Alan jerked and gasped, startled, and began to pull away, but Marcy growled "Oh, no, you don't!"—not yet! not after all that trouble!"—and grabbed him back down. "Whore!" Arnold was screaming, "Filthy strumpet!" and Alan was saying "What?! What?!" in a kind of wild dazed panic, but she kept rubbing herself up against him, hugging him with her arms and legs, saying, "Don't worry about that! Don't pay any attention!" until at last he gave a convulsive shudder and lunged forward. She felt a sharp, tearing pain, and then he was gasping stertorously next to her ear as Arnold screamed and raved and gibbered incoherently from the ceiling. After a few moments Arnold's voice fell silent, and she smiled.

At last Alan moaned and collapsed crushingly on top of her. She lay unprotestingly under his weight, not even caring if she'd gotten pregnant.

Free of him at last, she thought.

Alan sat up, still bewildered.

"You can put your pants on now," she said dryly.

A few minutes later, her father began to pound at the door.

There was the expected scene. Screaming, slapping, crying, hysteria. "You're not my daughter—you're no daughter of mine." Slut. Whore. Et cetera. Marcy remained dry-eyed and unmoved through it all. Alan cowered in a corner, wrapped in a sheet, looking tousled and terrified, occasionally opening his mouth to speak, only to shut it again when one of Marcy's parents advanced shrieking upon him. Her parents swore that they would press charges against Alan—especially if (God forbid) she was pregnant—and hurled sulfurous threats involving jail and lawyers back at him as they left, but eventually they would give up on the idea of prosecution, fearing more scandal. (Fortunately, Marcy

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was *not* pregnant.) She said goodbye politely to Alan—he gaped at her, still looking bewildered, still wrapped in a sheet, and said nothing—and calmly followed her sputtering parents out of his apartment. She never saw him again. She packed a bag, took the money she had been saving, and moved out of her parents' house that very night. She never saw them again, either.

She stayed that night in a Holiday Inn, and spent the next few weeks in an inexpensive boardinghouse. She got a job at a five-and-dime, later worked as a counter-girl in a second-rate greasy spoon. For the first few weeks she stayed in her room every night, scared and lonely, still more than half-expecting to hear Arnold's voice at any second, but eventually, cautiously, she began to feel that she might actually be rid of him after all.

After a couple of months, she landed a better job in the accounting department of a moderate-sized engineering firm, and was able to afford a small apartment of her own in a shabby-genteel neighborhood on the far side of town. She worked with impressive efficiency and a total concentration that brought her rapid promotions; within a couple of years she was doing pretty well financially, and moved into a much better apartment in a quiet residential high-rise. She was generally popular with her co-workers, although she only occasionally joined them on Bowling Night or went with them on their expeditions to movies or restaurants or bars, and dated even less frequently. Those few who resented her reserve sometimes called her "The Nun" or "Little Mary Sunshine," but most of her colleagues appreciated her cheerful, even-tempered disposition, and the speculation that she "just didn't go out much" because she was still recovering from an unhappy love affair soon became an unquestioned part of office mythology—some people could even tell you all about the guy and why they'd broken up (in one version he'd turned out to be married; in another, he'd died slowly and dramatically of cancer).

A few of the more perceptive of her friends noticed that occasionally, right in the middle of things—while she was chatting over morning coffee, or discussing an audit with a section head, or telling the latest Polack joke in a bar during Happy Hour—Marcy would suddenly fall completely silent and freeze motionless for a heartbeat or two, as if she had abruptly and magically been turned into stone. None of them noticed, however, that at such times her eyes would invariably and almost imperceptibly flick upwards, as if she had suddenly sensed someone looking over her shoulder.

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* * *

Marcy only ever actually saw Arnold in the flesh once, and that was years after she had left home, at a party.

It was a reception given for the opening of the new wing of the Museum, and Marcy was sipping pale sherry and talking to Joanne Korman when she heard an unmistakable voice, a voice that she hadn't heard in actuality since she was eighteen, although it had often whispered through her dreams at night. She turned around, and there was Arnold, eating cucumber sandwiches and blathering pompously about something or other to a Museum staffer. Arnold turned out to be a short, potbellied man with a large nose and a receding chin, impeccably groomed—his hair was slick and shiny and combed into photographically-exact furrows—and expensively, if somewhat conservatively, dressed. He held his cucumber sandwich as if he was a praying mantis, holding it up near his chin with both hands and turning it around and around and around before taking a small surgical bite out of it. His eyes were small, humorless, and opaque, and he never seemed to blink. Marcy watched him in fascination. It was so strange to see Arnold's lips move and hear that familiar voice—sanctimonious, self-righteous, self-satisfied—issue from them instead of from the empty air. . . .

Arnold felt her watching him, and looked up. They stared at each other for a moment across the crowded room. There was no doubt that he recognized her. She saw his lips purse up tight, as if he had tasted something foul, and then he sneered at her, his face haughty and smugly contemptuous. Slowly, deliberately, disdainfully, he turned his back on her.

Marcy could never remember how she got back to her apartment that night. She didn't sleep. The next morning at work she was numb and bemused at first, but then she began to get mad, and the more she thought about the incident, the madder she got.

She fumed about it for the next few days, her anger growing rich and red and violent, deepening into a rage that made her feel that she was going to fly to flinders like an exploding steam boiler if she didn't find some way to vent the pressure. She hadn't allowed herself to think about Arnold—really *think* about him—for a very long time. She knew now that it had cost her dearly, that by sealing all that emotion away and refusing to deal with it, she had somehow placed her life on hold. Instead of letting the wound really heal, she had just let a scab of numbing callus form over it. Underneath that, everything had been festering undisturbed

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for years, unexamined—she had wrenched her thoughts away into a different channel every time they came anywhere near the danger area, the taboo ground.

But now the scab had been yanked off, and she was furious. He was so *smug*. That was what had really done it, that was what was not to be borne—after everything that he'd done to her, *he* still considered himself to be the injured party! He was so goddamn sleek and smug and self-satisfied, it made her feel dizzy with hate just to think of it. Undoubtedly he was smirking at himself in the mirror right now and telling himself how *right* he had been about her, how he had tried and *tried* to help her lead a decent life, but she just wouldn't *listen*, how she had proved herself *unworthy* of him. . . . She couldn't stand to think of it. She *couldn't*. He had tormented her for a decade, ruined her childhood, and she had let him get *away* with it, let him walk around for years congratulating himself that all his worst expectations had come true, let him get away scot-free. The *bastard*. Somehow, she had to even the score. She *had* to. Only then would she have a chance of laying the ghosts that haunted her, only then would she maybe be able to shake off the past and go on to lead a normal life. She kept hearing that gloating voice of his on that long-ago day saying "every cent—it's worth it." Somehow, she had to make him *pay*, and pay more than he was willing to spend.

She paced for hours, as restlessly as a panther in a cage, up and down the length of her apartment, the muscles in her jaw standing out in bands, her eyes glittering dangerously. Abruptly, she stopped. She remained completely still for a moment, and then she laughed out loud and—in a sudden fierce burst of exultation—threw the coffee cup she'd been sipping from against the wall. It exploded like a small ceramic bomb, leaving a brown stain on the pale pastel wallpaper, and she laughed again. She sat down at her desk and began going through her checkbook. After a while, she pulled out a calculator and began punching figures into it.

The next day, she went shopping.

Later that night, long after the technicians had left, she sat in her darkened living room before the newly-installed console and ran her fingers caressingly over the switches and keyboards. Her heart was thumping fiercely against her ribs, and she could hardly make herself sit still behind the controls. She had been practicing for hours, and now she thought that she'd gotten the hang of it. She touched the keyboard, and the viewscreen lit up with a misty

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collage of moving images. She punched in the co-ordinates, and then used the fine-tuning to hunt around until she found a place where the young Arnold Waxman—pimply-faced and fat, just barely post-pubescent—was standing alone in his bathroom at night. His pants were down around his knees, and he had a *Playboy* gatefold in one hand. He had a stupid, preoccupied look on his face, and there was a strand of saliva glistening in the corner of his half-opened mouth.

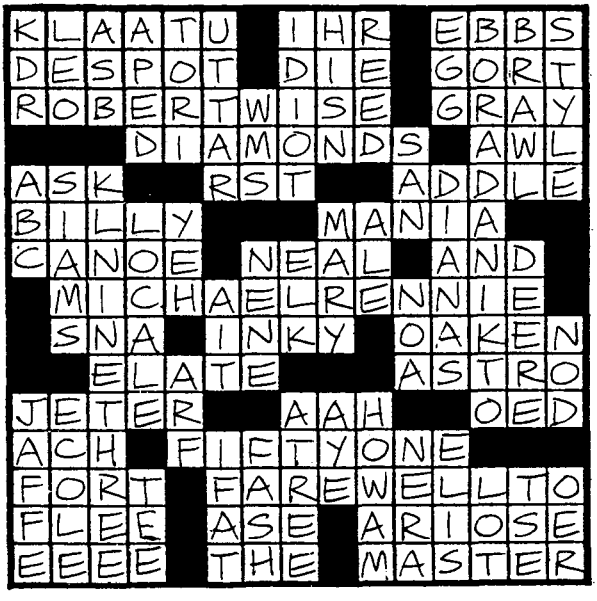
Marcy leaned forward and touched the *Transmit* button. "Arnold!" she said sternly, watching him jump and gasp, "Arnold, you mustn't *do* that!"

Then, slowly, she smiled. ●

Asfm Puzzle #16

From page 23

The 28-23-31-65-8-10- 36-55-17-5-53-13-71-44- 54-20-42-62-43- 2-30



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ON BOOKS by Baird Searles

Millennium
By John Varley
Berkley Books, $6.95 (paper)

It is strongly suggested that if you want some light reading to get you through your next air journey, John Varley's new novel *Millennium* not be the book you choose. It opens with a horrendous crash involving two jumbo jets over the California countryside, in which all aboard are killed. Much of the rest of the book is devoted to the cleanup and investigation thereof, with more than a little grisly detail. The main character is an investigator for the National Safety Board—one of those chaps one sees on TV after a major accident, usually saying they'll have no comment until more facts are known.

This Bill Smith becomes, temporarily (that word is used deliberately as a pun, for reasons that will become clear), the most important man in the universe. His story alternates with that of one Louise Baltimore, a lady (a loosely-used term) from the future of mucho thousands of years ahead. Louise is part of an organization that, with the help of a time gate, "kidnaps"—into the future—all those aboard doomed aircraft in the brief period just before the disaster occurs (as well as the personnel of becalmed Viking ships and other disaster-destined vehicles).

What does she have to do with Bill Smith? In the aforementioned crash, a "twonky" occurs. (Old SF hands will recognize the origin of the word; you newcomers can research it.) A twonky is a paradox-causing situation; in the case of this particular occurrence, a weapon of the future has been left on one of the planes as the future kidnappers have made off with those aboard. Bill Smith happens to find it while inspecting the remains. What he does may destroy the fabric of time and the universe; the entire resources of the future Umpteenth Century are marshalled to prevent this.

An intriguing situation, presented with a drawback or two. Louise is one of those women that seem to be appearing more and more in SF (drawn—I could be wrong here—mostly by men):

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cynical, tough, capable, and foul-mouthed, and sexually voracious to boot, but of course a softy inside (admirers of later Heinlein will say, "Thank God it's Friday."). Not the sort most people would find appealing in reality, and so far as I'm concerned, not much more so as the protagonist of a novel. She also seems excessively prone to using the 1980s as a frame of reference, considering when she's from and that she has ranged most of human history; comparing her time's ruling council of nine members to a baseball team doesn't make her all that convincing as a product of the distant future, even if her most vital mission is concentrated on this decade.

Another factor that keeps nagging at the reader is that the rules of time travel as presented here sometimes seem more created for the purposes of the novel than natural laws; Varley appears to be straining a bit to make it all work.

But one keeps reading nevertheless; the novel is set up so that the purpose of the ghoulish and high-handed activities of Louise and her people are revealed slowly, and you're not going to stop until you find out what it is as as well as how the twonky is resolved. The resolution is pretty cosmic; there have been deus ex machinas in SF before, Lord knows, but this may be the most literal ever.

Code of the Lifemaker
By James P. Hogan
Del Rey, $13.95

It's a bit ironic that the publicity blat on the advance copy of James P. Hogan's *Code of the Lifemaker* describes it as "his most accessible book to date." Hogan is an idea man, and his novels are based on these ideas (one can almost see the light bulb around which the story is created); I've noted before that the amount of story space he takes to set up the basic situation is inordinate. The new one is all but impenetrable; it seems that the plot will never get off the ground.

The idea here is a robot civilization, established millennia ago on Titan, Saturn's moon. Hogan devoted a good deal of intellectual effort in a Prologue to establish a realistic, self-contained culture created by computerized robots set adrift from their parent civilization by its destruction by a nova (which also does strange things to the robots' self-reproducing functions and results in a robotic equivalent of sex).

We are then plunged into Earth of the future, and introduced to a host of human characters of astonishing anonymity; they are much more difficult to sort out than the robots, and are involved in some sort of situation having to do with all sorts of governmental agencies of the alphabet soup variety.

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It's about here the reader comes very close to bogging down—one despairs that things will ever get moving.

They do, eventually, with the first manned expedition to Titan, and the first encounter between Earth culture and robot culture, which by this time has gotten to the Medieval — separate nations, wars, religion, et al. The humans are set down in the middle of a situation as complicated as the earlier one on Earth, but a bit more interesting.

As usual, when Hogan finally gets it going, it goes well, and the rest of the book is generally amusing, with the humans meddling (on the whole beneficially, for a change) in the robots' affairs. The robot civilization verges perilously close to Piers Anthony cuteness, and Hogan doesn't seem to have the inate gift of nomenclature and word invention that's vitally important in this sort of thing ("Goyderooch, Head Robeing of the village of Xerxeon, stood with Casquedin, the village prayer and beseecher . . ." is an example). It's still well conceived, but with the number of novels he has to his credit by now, there's no excuse for the commission of the classic error of young SF writers: the good idea ineptly realized as a fiction. It's about time Hogan devoted a little effort to the technique of story telling and to creating characters with some trace of individuality.

The Sword Is Forged
By Evangeline Walton
Timescape, $13.95

A small but intriguing subgenre of fantasy is the retelling of myth and legend, taking the often surrealist and illogical stuff of folktales-become-theology and forming it into coherent fiction, with three-dimensional characters and some sense of underlying logic, rather than the out-ot-left-field magic to which mythology is prone. (That Persephone had to stay with Hades half the year because she ate six pomegranate seeds is a pretty arbitrary plot device, though anthropologists have explained the background symbolism.)

Evangeline Walton has previously retold the Welsh cycle of legends, The Mabinogion, in a tetrology of novels highly regarded by fantasists. Here she goes back to the Greek and begins a series dealing with the life of Theseus. The first is *The Sword Is Forged,* and Walton chooses to handle the legendary elements realistically; there are no overtly supernatural elements, but only the characters' continuing awareness of the presence of the Gods, who may or may not be manipulating things—it is up to the reader as to interpretation. Traditionally Theseus does in the Minotaur

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(i.e., the mainland Greeks conquer the Minoan culture) early in his career, only later becoming involved with Hippolyte, Queen of the Amazons. Walton has transposed events; *The Sword Is Forged* has to do with his capture of the young Amazon Queen (here Antiope; Hippolyte is a traditional title) whom he first sees when he accompanies Hercules to the warrior women's country (it is one of the Big Fella's labors to seize the girdle of their queen, which in this case turns out to be a sort of rape-resistant chastity belt). All this occurs pre-Labyrinth.

The reworking is intelligently conceived and nicely written; we alternate between the Greece of Theseus and Antiope's country and the culture of the Amazons is cleverly and colorfully realized. There's also a sense of historical period; the Hittites are involved, Akhenaton is often mentioned, and always Minos and the Cretans are dominant in the background. *But*—and it's a but I really regret—there is inevitably the memory of Mary Renault's Theseus novels, *The King Must Die* and *The Bull from the Sea,* which have all but definitively set the legend in this form. Because the basic material is necessarily the same, despite Walton's variations on the theme, their shadow hangs over this telling of the tale. *The Sword Is Forged* is well done, indeed; it's something of a tragedy that it was even better done elsewhere.

The Tartarus Incident
By William Greenleaf
Ace, $2.50 (paper)

William Greenleaf is an author new to me, but his novel *The Tartarus Incident* is a neat little science fiction thriller, of a sort that doesn't come along very often. All the ingedients are familiar in one way or another, but they're put together here in a manner that seems fresh.

The United Nations Space Administration, in a future of many explored and exploited worlds, operates out of a sort of large mother ship, sending its personnel, from auditors to explorers, to the various planets by a variation of matter transmission utilizing small vessels known unoriginally as pods. By an unlikely series of accidents, the supposedly foolproof system manages to dump five passengers on a just-discovered planet named Tartarus, about which practically nothing is known except its coordinates, which have been left lying around in the computer at just the wrong time. The five passengers are *not* the hardy elite of the Service who do the exploring; they are, in fact, accountants, on their way to audit the post on the world, Sierra.

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Once their pod arrives on Tartarus, they are, in effect, lost. From here the suspense is developed in two separate streams. The major one is, of course, our bewildered auditors, initially trying to get the pod to return, or at least the communicator to work, in an extremely hostile environment. They eventually discover that trusty old standby, an ancient, abandoned city. In its largest and most labyrinthine building, in ways valid for a thriller, they all manage to get separated and, inevitably, it turns out that the city is *not* totally abandoned—there are some extremely nasty things left over.

Contrapuntally, we follow the desperate efforts of one conscientious communications clerk back on the mother ship who is the only person there to grasp what has happened. He fights offical disbelief and incompetence to solve the puzzle of just where the straying pod has gone, in time to save the quintet whose survival time, he knows, is limited.

The novel speeds along at a good pace, keeping both suspense elements smartly in line. One of the neater aspects of the story is that it is, indeed, true to its title—it is an incident, a small-scaled happening that is *not* world- or even society-shaking. There isn't much at stake except the lives of five people, and while that may not seem all that unusual, think about it. How many SF novels can you say that about?

I would guess that the author is deliberately writing for a movie sale; it has the elements, particularly the nasty things creeping around in the constricted environment (a la *Alien*), and the countdown quality of any number of screen suspense thrillers. He's done a good job of getting it on paper; let's hope some perceptive film story editor has the sense to get it transferred to screen. In the meantime, we readers have a very diverting, if not necessarily distinguished, chiller to call our own.

The Blue Hawk
Peter Dickinson
Del Rey, $2.50 (paper)

Peter Dickinson may be the most interesting writer of fantasy not yet well enough known in the United States. Part of the reason for this might be the prodigality of his talent; he writes many kinds of books, and all, apparently, have done well. His *A Summer In the Twenties* which I read recently, is a wonderfully nostalgic novel of English university life and the General Strike in the 1920s, certainly as good as *Brideshead Revisited* in its evocation of the period and its diverse characters, though without the depth of Waugh's themes. I hear from an aficionado of the field that

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his mystery stories are excellent examples of their kind. And his fantasies are strikingly original, though only a couple have appeared over here.

Therefore it's a pleasure to see his *The Blue Hawk* return to print in the U.S. It's Dickinsonian in being not quite like anything else, and in pulling off a trick that means taking a real author's chance.

The setting is not identified specifically as to time or place, and the story is concerned with a culture, obviously human, but certainly not from the past as we know it. There are strong resemblances to dynastic Egypt, so strong that the reader wants to read Amon, Ptah, and Horus for the names of the gods, and Nile for the name of the river along which this civilization is built, and Dickinson's alternate nomenclature (the sun god O, the war god Sinu, the river Tan, who is also a god, of course) takes a bit of getting used to.

In this milieu the author sets a fairly conventional story of a young novice to the priesthood, and his friendship and alliance with the adolescent King which involves him with the intrigues of the priests against the monarchy. Plot and counterplot are brought to a climax by the invasion of nomadic barbarians from across the mountains.

This is saved from banality by Dickinson's creative touch with character and incident, and the myriad details of the society, which is not by any means an exact duplicate of the Egyptian. Over all broods the machinations of the Gods, who are felt strongly by the characters, though never directly manifesting themselves.

So far, one might think one has come into a rather curious historical novel, differing only from many others by the fact that it seems to be dealing with a fictional history. But in the last few pages of the final chapter, Dickinson, almost obliquely, suddenly changes our entire view of the book. More than that I will not say, but it's a daring performance, since he's gambling on holding our interest through the whole story to reveal what he does when he does.

More Dickinson, please.

Red Moon and Black Mountain
By Joy Chant
Bantam, $3.50 (paper)

From blue hawks to red moons, and another long-unavailable work to be greeted with joy. It may be hard to believe, considering the tide of sorcerers, enchantresses, elves, and trolls in which we seem to be drowning these days, but back in 1970 the pure, Tolkienesque fantasy was a rare item indeed, particularly one that aspired to something more than Conantic thud-and-blunder. One

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of the bare handful to be published in that time was Joy Chant's *Red Moon and Black Mountain*. I came back to it on the occasion of its being reprinted with some fear that it wouldn't be as special as I remembered it, that its quality came only from its being such a *rara avis* in its time.

No fear. This novel of three young siblings, brought into another world (vaguely reminiscent of Middle-Earth, but with its own distinct qualities) by the Gods of that world for their own purposes, holds up extraordinarily well. Don't be put off by the fact that the three are children; this, like the Dickinson, is not necessarily a juvenile. The oldest boy becomes a warrior of the Khentors (the roving warriors of the plains met again in Chant's prequel, *The Grey Mane of Morning)* and is soon confronted with moral choices that are far from simplistic. The major dilemma is startlingly close to that of Luke's in *The Return of the Jedi,* but presented with a good deal more subtlety.

In the meantime, the other brother and sister have become involved in other elements of this complex world. The girl joins In'Serinna, enchantress of the Star Magic, and her people, the Children of the Stars, the Nine Houses of the Starborn. The boy finds the Borderer, the wandering remnant of the Tenth House, and the people of Nelimhon, the Dancer's Forest forbidden to man. As you can see, Chant is one that *does* have the gift of nomenclature, and if those samples don't intrigue you, forget it. This novel isn't your dish of tea.

Recent publications by those connected with this magazine include *Starships* edited by Isaac Asimov, Martin Harry Greenberg, and Charles G. Waugh, Fawcett, $3.50 (paper).

Books to be considered for review in this column should be submitted to Baird Searles, % The Science Fiction Shop, 56 8th Ave., New York, New York 10014. ●

NEXT ISSUE

The Mid-December issue of *IAsfm* is chock-full of fiction we're sure you'll enjoy. Octavia Butler will make her debut in these pages with her powerful cover story, "Speech Sounds." In addition, we've got short stories and novelettes by Norman Spinrad, Ian Watson, Leigh Kennedy, Jack C. Haldeman II, and others. Pick up your copy, on sale November 22, 1983.

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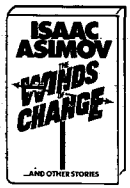

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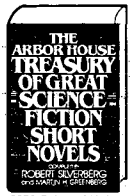

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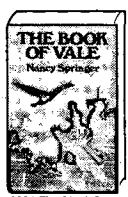

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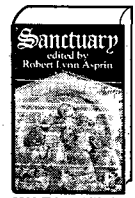

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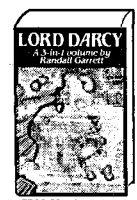

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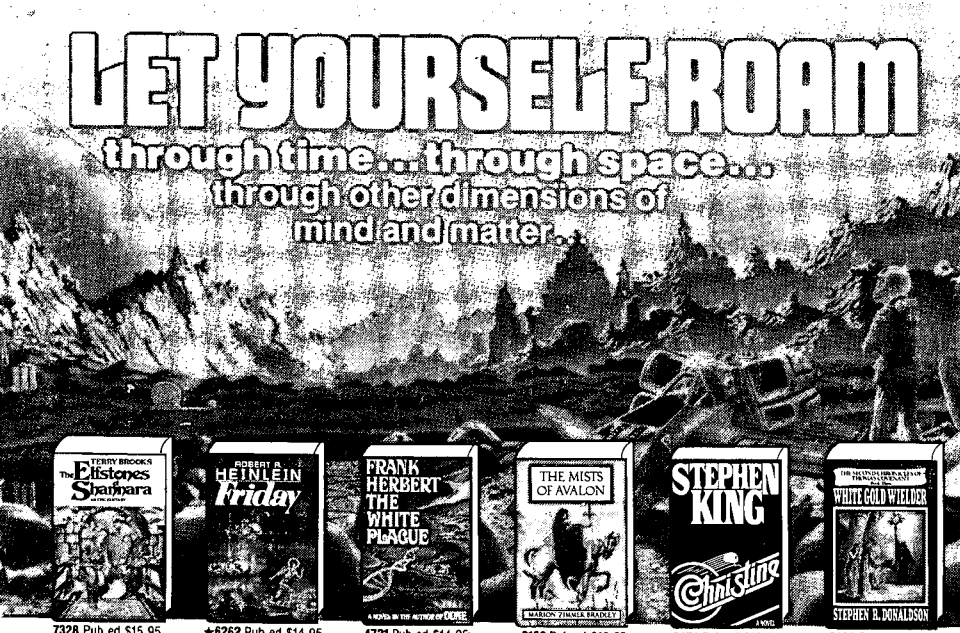

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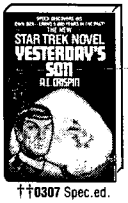

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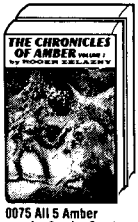

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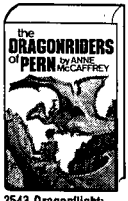

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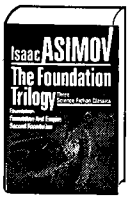

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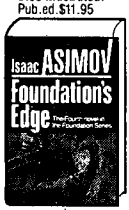

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